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Fight against surveillance – is it a losing battle?

It is not just Aadhaar (a 12-digit unique identity number issued to all Indian residents based on their biometric and demographic data), demanding finger printing, iris records and now, facial profiling, along with other personal details. The issue goes deeper, whittling away citizens' autonomy in ways small and not-so-small, says **Sakuntala Narasimhan,** who is also worried about other manifestations of intrusion, large and small, into our daily routines, thanks to the introduction of technological sophistication in the name of 'progress'

On a recent chilly January morning, while I was busy in the kitchen preparing breakfast, my mobile phone rang in the living room. I hurried to take the call as I was waiting for confirmation of a medical appointment. The caller said "I am D.K. Shivakumar" and went on to offer greetings for the New Year. Shivakumar is a minister in the Karnataka Government (and has been under investigation by the Supreme Court in a land grabbing case and also had searches conducted by the Income Tax Department for alleged tax evasion). I do not know him. This was a "promotional" call, seeking political mileage (elections for the state are approaching). I resented the unwanted intrusion into my routine.

Once upon a time, before sophisticated technology made such unsolicited/ unwanted calls possible, politicians had to trudge from door to door with folded hands, seeking votes; now they can save their energy and make me scurry to take their calls. Intrusive? You bet. I am not even sure if it is a recording that some assistant or clerk is put in charge of, to be sent to thousands of citizens. For all I know, it could be, without the minister having to exert himself. It could even be a prankster calling up and pretending to be the minister. Either way, it is an unwanted call, interfering with my routine when I could be busy or resting. As a senior citizen, I resent the intrusion even more.

On my mobile again, I get messages reminding -- and urging -- me to listen to the prime minister's monthly Mann ki Baath broadcast. Thousands/ lakhs of such messages are obviously being sent – at whose expense? If it is a commercial promotional call for selling some product, the law allows me to register under a Do Not Disturb registry (but even that works only partially – as I will describe presently). Do politicians' calls of this kind come under the DND law? Why not,

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FROM THE EDITOR

No invasion of our privacy, please

It's been a while now since we have been talking about Aadhaar. Wikipedia defines Aadhaar as a 12-digit unique identity number issued to all Indian residents based on their biometric and demographic data. How hard we have had to toil to get our Aadahar card! We know that too well, don't we? There are so many stories, it would take a book recounting.

Aadhaar has been spoken about so much in recent times that *Oxford Dictionaries* chose Aadhaar as the Hindi word of 2017. Supreme Court judge D.Y. Chandrachud said he would better want to be known as a "nationalist judge" rather than an "Aadhaar judge" (the judge was irked when a senior lawyer, while making submissions on behalf of one of the petitioners against Aadhaar, used the term "Aadhaar judges").

Aadhaar has been the subject of several rulings by the Supreme Court of India. One of the early orders stated that "no person should suffer for not getting Aadhaar". The question arose whether Aadhaar was voluntary or mandatory. The apex court said that the government could not deny a service to a resident who did not possess Aadhaar, as it was voluntary and not mandatory.

Then arose more pertinent questions – will the Aadhaar card affect the privacy of an individual, will it intrude into our lives, compromise our privacy? Sakuntala Narasimhan's lead piece in this issue addresses these questions (of not just Aadhaar) – about harassment and our privacy being lost so easily to all and sundry. These questions are especially important in today's context when freedom and expression seem to matter so much more than ever before.

The Unique Identity Authority of India (UIDAI) stresses that Aadhaar is an identification tool, not a profiling one. However, the confusion in the common person's mind continues. To compound matters, there have been been reports in the media about how not having an Aadhaaar card can affect your life. A pregnant woman in Jaunpur District in Uttar Pradesh, for instance, was forced to deliver a baby at the gate of a medical centre after she was allegedly turned away by doctors for not having a bank account or Aadhaar card, a report stated. A *Times of India* report said many people living in various old age homes across Uttar Pradesh had been denied pension benefits in the absence of Aadhaar cards.

The latest step taken by UIDAI to increase Aadhaar security is to introduce face recognition. The measure, which is likely to be implemented by July this year, will be used in 'fusion' with existing modes such as fingerprints, iris recognition and one-time password (OTP) used for authentication. Will this be enough to quell fears of the ordinary citizen? We are all happy to comply with rules and requirements as long as our privacy is not compromised in any manner. Is there a way the government can guarantee that? *The Economic Times* says the privacy debate will be settled once and for all and that 2018 is likely to be "Aadhaar's breakout year", whatever that means. Well, we can only wait and hope that all ends well.

There is some focus on education in this issue. Veteran editor and journalist S. Muthiah turns the spotlight on several problems that bedevil education in India. He says the majority of students from state syllabus schools are found unemployable by organisations around the country. If we are to turn out employable college graduates, we have to produce better high school graduates, he says. This means that the graduates have to be focused not only on Maths and the Sciences (and Accountancy, if from the Commerce stream) but must be all-round students as knowledgeable in the Humanities as they are presumed to be in Maths, Physics and Chemistry/ Biology. Also, English language for teachers as well as students must be an area of strong focus, whatever be the medium of instruction in the school.

I received an article from a schoolteacher conveying the message that there is so much more to life than competition and success in an examination. How true! Wish more parents and teachers thought like her. What do students think about school education?

An essay competition was held in Chennai to get students to indicate their views on the present state of school education in Tamil Nadu and provide suggestions for improvement. An article here that lists out the observations made by students makes for interesting reading.

Here's wishing all of you a Very Happy New Year!

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Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

if they disturb me and I do not want them? Where does one draw the line, in demarking the boundaries of 'intrusion'?

I have registered under DND, but when I complained about receiving promotional calls from some company, I was told that under TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India) rules, my complaint cannot be taken up unless I describe the contents of the call received. Why should I spend time listening to the contents of an unwanted call from some unknown company trying to sell me something and note the gist down, when I am in the middle of my work? Why is it not enough if I provide the number of the caller who got through in spite of my having registered under DND? Doesn't forcing me to listen to the call, instead of cutting the call as soon as I realise that it is a promotional message, make a mockery of the DND facility?

Which means I am at the mercy of unwanted callers – sellers, politicians, promoters – whether I like it or not. Just because I own a phone or Internet facility. Should technology help citizens to enjoy freedom from intrusion and enhance our autonomy, or victimise us? Do these come under ads -- selling their party ideology, or themselves as political candidates for forthcoming election – which is what they are?

Mobile phones put citizens at the mercy of callers at all hours, not just when they are home and able to access the landline. Which may be a good thing, for people dependent on commercial or work-related contacts, but not for everybody. However, a mobile has become almost a compelling need today, whether one likes it or not. Even for those who do not need one and feel it is an intrusion. No one is asking why.

While the debate on the safety of citizens' biometric data under Aadhaar (and the constitutional validity of its being made mandatory) is being hotly discussed in and out of the apex court, I am also worried about other manifestations of intrusion, large and small, into our daily routines, thanks to the introduction of technological sophistication

in the name of 'progress'. If 'progress' and 'development' mean greater autonomy and freedom for individuals, we need to question some of the more subtle – but intrusive all the same – manifestations such as those mentioned above.

The right to be left alone as long as I am not breaking any law is also as important in a democracy, as the right to privacy and personal data. There have been many public mobilisations based on this -- the Take Back movements (take back the night, for women's safety; take back the commons' protests against the privatisation of public resources such as grazing pastures, water sources, public land and forests on which tribal people and rural communities depend).

In the obsessive pursuit of economic growth and gross domestic product (GDP) as the dominant mantras in the corridors of power (regardless of the political party in power), 'privatisation' has caused the curtailment of resources to the deprived sections, thereby whittling their safety nets and security. Families ousted from their ancestral lands to make way for industrial ventures (Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh – and elsewhere); dams that divert water for power generation to mega industries while cutting off access to rural communities (Andhra Pradesh) – if these make news as unacceptable erosion of the democratic, basic rights of individuals, the other kinds of intrusive truncations that violate the right to be left alone are equally worrisome, but do not get debated because they are non-dramatic, not 'life threatening'.

Technological sophistication causes another kind of erosion of privacy too – surveillance. Keeping track of my emails and website visits for instance. "But that's to prevent terrorist activities", says one argument. Why is it assumed that we are all potential terrorists, when even the law says a person is innocent till proved guilty through due process (in a court of law) ? Using the same argument, can we justify locking up every house from outside by the police, to 'prevent robbery'? Isn't snooping also an invasion of privacy?

I once surfed the Internet to check the best airfare available for a Boston-Bengaluru trip. Thereafter, every time I opened my computer, I got fare charts, though I was no longer interested. I did not want the information any more, and I did not want to waste time deleting information that I was seeking. If I have ordered a laptop online, that fact is carefully preserved and followed up, with further offers (which I am not interested in) from the retailer or manufacturer. Granted that tracking call records or website visits can help solve crime, that is again no different from locking up all doors from outside as a tactic to prevent theft.

You do not inconvenience (or spy on) thousands of citizens in order to cope with one criminal (or potential wrongdoer). Peeping into what I do, where I go, who I contact, what numbers I dial, and what I buy, is also unacceptable intrusion, driven either by commercial profit motives or political surveillance.

The debate on surveillance and privacy needs to be widened to ensure that personal autonomy does not get truncated in the name of 'improving services' or efficiency. Citizens' rights are paramount. Or should be. Along with ethics. In all walks of life. Which is what our Father of the Nation always emphasised. ■

(The writer, based in Bengaluru, is a recipient of the Media Foundation's Chameli Devi Award for Outstanding Woman Journalist 1983. Her fortnightly columns on gender issues and consumer rights ran in the Deccan Herald *for 27 years. She had earlier worked for The Times of India Group in Mumbai.)*

Sourav Majumdar appointed editor of *Fortune*

Sourav Majumdar, previously editor, *Forbes India*, has now joined *Fortune* as the editor. With a career spanning over two decades, Majumdar has worked with Indian business dailies like *Business Standard* and *The Financial Express,* heading editions and leading news and features teams. He also reported extensively on the Indian financial markets, in particular, the Securities & Exchange Board of India and the Reserve bank of India. He holds a first-class Economics degree from St Xavier's College, Kolkata. ■

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)

BUDGET AND THE MEDIA

Issues need careful scrutiny through the year

The presentation of the Union Budget is obviously the time when budget-related issues get the maximum attention in the media. However, such issues need to be followed up later as they remain relevant through the year. Unfortunately, the follow-up exercise does not generally get due attention, says **Bharat Dogra**

When the Union Budget is presented, often the views one gets from the media, particularly the electronic media, are hurried views. Comments are mostly made based on what is heard in the budget speech as there is little time for a detailed examination of the various facts and figures.

The Finance minister, who presents the budget in Parliament, naturally tries do so in as much a positive and achievement-oriented way as possible. Hence, it is likely that the initial comments miss out on some of the not-so-obvious but nevertheless important and critical aspects.

Later, of course, some of the points are covered by the print media or even some of the TV channels, but a crucial public opinion forming phase has passed by then. The overall impression one is left with is that the most critical public view forming phase is dominated by very hurried responses.

In this context I recall a conversation with an expert on agricultural issues whose views are often sought by TV channels. He said that his first comments immediately after the budget speech were favourable but he had doubts when he later came across some worrying aspects in the budget. Once he had made a thorough study, he became critical, he said. In this case, the expert happened to be a very frank person who did not hesitate to admit his own possibly mistaken and hurried initial statements but, generally, people prefer to stick to those first hurried observations.

It will be helpful if TV channels can have a second round of detailed discussions on the budget after about a week or so, so that a more well-informed and comprehensive view becomes available. The print media is in a better position to provide such analysis but then both print and television often seem to have a reluctance in examining the budget from the perspective of weaker sections of society and focus on priority areas such as poverty reduction and meeting the basic needs.

Of course, for a more complete picture, one needs to look at state budgets as well, and coverage of state budgets is often inadequate in the national media. So, a complete and comprehensive view or picture covering the Union and state budgets generally does not emerge. There is far less coverage of finances of local government institutions.

In the context of some of the larger cities, there may be reasonably adequate coverage, but in smaller towns and especially in rural areas where the vast majority of India's population lives, there is very little coverage of the finances of local self-government institutions (including the three-tier panchayat structures in villages).

Then again, after the Union and state budgets are presented, there is the need to look at the process of revising estimates, providing supplementary grants, etc. This becomes important in situations where revised estimates are significantly different from budget estimates. Information about such revised figures is available rather late. The result is that when there are cuts or reductions in allocations for important priority areas that merit media attention immediately, the coverage comes too late in the day.

To give an example, during FY 2015-16, the budget allocation for the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation was Rs 5635 crore but the actual expenditure the ministry incurred for the period was only Rs 1761 crore, despite the fact that so many pressing needs of the urban poor, including homeless people, were crying out for attention. If only the media can report on such realities quickly, the situation on the ground may improve with some form of remedial action initiated by the government. Equally important is the point about keeping people informed about such non-utilisation of funds and, in some cases, diversion of funds from priority areas. ■

(The writer is a freelance journalist based in Delhi who has been associated with several social movements and initiatives.)

UTTAR PRADESH CIVIC POLLS

How different interpretations queered the pitch

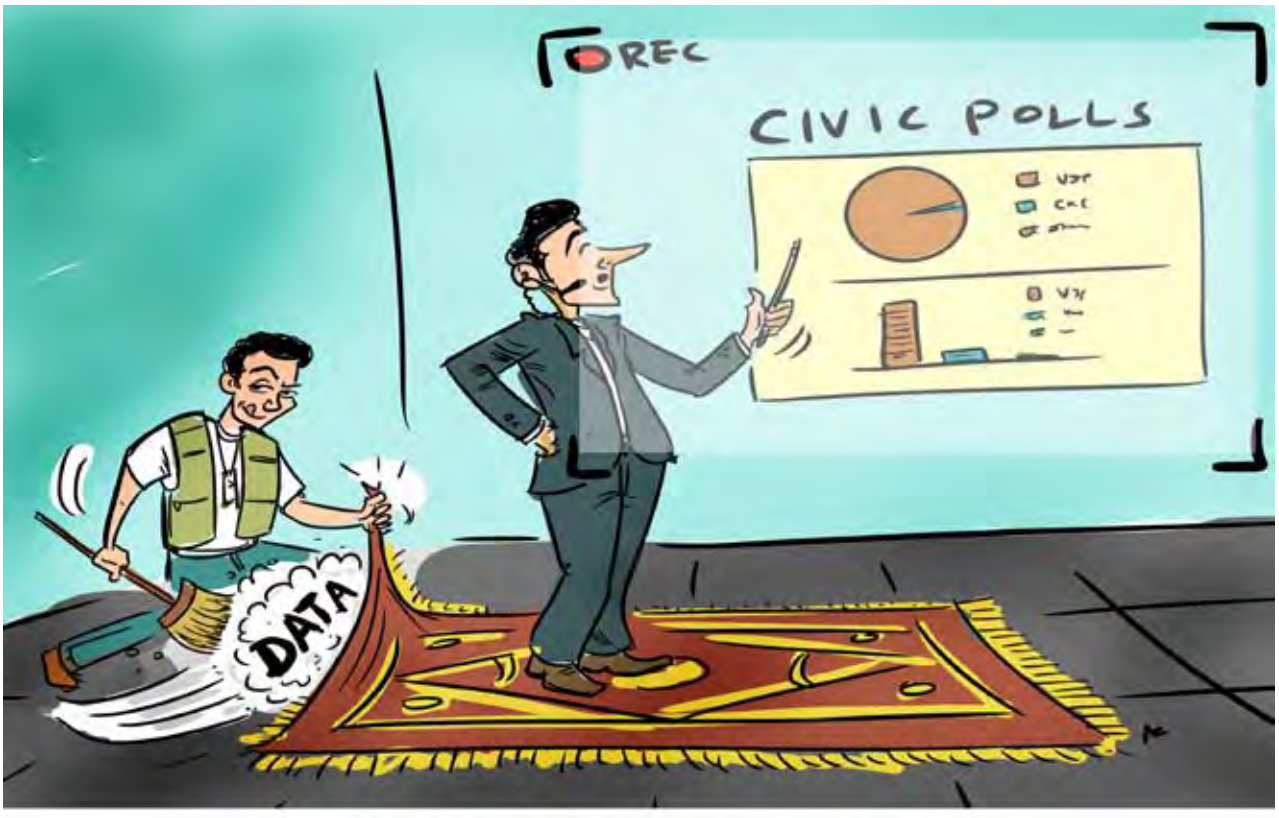
Were the results of the recent civic polls in Uttar Pradesh as overwhelmingly in favour of the BJP as initial media coverage made it out to be? **Bharat Dogra** says the immediate coverage of elections, which is most important in influencing public opinion, was highly distorted and biased

An analysis of the media coverage of the recent civic polls (elections to three tiers of urban self-government institutions) in Uttar Pradesh once again demonstrates that a hurried interpretation of results can be very misleading, particularly if there is pressure to make the interpretation in a particular way.

There was a lot of interest in the elections as Uttar Pradesh is rightly considered the most important state in the overall electoral mathematics of India and, furthermore, it has been witnessing several controversies. The national media devoted a good amount of space to the results (all references to print media in this article are limited to Delhi and National Capital Region editions).

A study of the coverage shows that at least initially there was a strong tendency in the print media, radio and TV, apart from other sectors, to portray the results as being much more favourable to the BJP than they actually were. To achieve the objective, selective statistics were used. However, at a later stage, some balance was restored in the overall coverage.

As the results were announced on December 1, most TV channels and radio news bulletins were quick to present it as a more or less clean sweep by the BJP. That was the way the headlines in the following day's newspapers projected it as well.



"CLEAN SWEEP"

Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

The interpretation was based on the single fact that the BJP had won 14 of the 16 mayoral seats in Tier I cities with municipal corporations. The point was in fact a very small part of the overall results.

However, *Dainik Bhaskar*, the Hindi newspaper, took care to give more detailed statistics. While the *Bhaskar* also presented it as a BJP victory on the whole, the data presented in the lead story on December 2 conveyed a different picture. On the basis of the data, the main headline of the newspaper was: 'BJP wins 46 per cent seats in cities, 15 per cent in rural areas'. The term 'rural areas' referred to the smaller towns and areas in the process of being urbanised. The data showed that the figure of 15 per cent was an average for Tier II and III towns. The headline was, thus, not appropriate – a 15 per cent victory rate in two of three tiers could not be interpreted as a clean sweep by any stretch of imagination.

The overall data presented in the *Bhaskar* report showed that the BJP had won 46 per cent of the total wards in Tier I cities (Nagar Nigam), 17 per cent of the total wards in Tier II cities (*nagar palika parishad*) and 12 per cent of the total wards in Tier III cities (*nagar* panchayat *sadasya*). The biggest victors in Tier II and III towns were independent candidates by far.

Moreover, the *Bhaskar* report said that in Tier I cities electronic voting machines (EVMs) were used, while in Tier II and Tier III cities, ballot papers were used. In view of the fact that apprehensions have been expressed by several opposition parties regarding the EVMs being doctored to favour the BJP, this piece of information attracted a lot of attention and several opposition leaders immediately issued statements alleging that EVMs had been used to favour the BJP at the Tier I level.

Statements to this effect by spokespersons of the Aam Aadmi Party, Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party got good space in the newspapers on December 3. *The Indian Express* carried several reports and charts on page 8, trying to give a more balanced picture of the results. The detailed analysis revealed that although various opposition parties were lagging behind the BJP, they had managed to hold some ground in their areas of influence and it would not be correct to call the election results a clean sweep by the BJP.

On the same day (December 3), The Wire (thewire.in) carried a report by one of its editors, M.K. Venu, saying that the election results actually showed that the BJP's vote share had decreased compared to Assembly elections in many areas. "An examination of the votes cast in the three tiers of urban governance bodies in UP roughly suggests that the BJP's vote share may have dropped by a total of 10 to 12 per cent points from the 42 per cent share it achieved in the UP Assembly polls earlier this year," the report said.

The report went on to say that the BJP won less than 30 per cent of the 652 posts of heads of urban bodies in all the tiers that went to polls. As for the heads of panchayats in the *nagar* (town) panchayats, Independents won 182 seats, BJP 100, the Samajwadi Party 83, the BSP 45 and the Congress 17.While initial reports had described the outcome as a 'clean sweep' by the BJP and a 'complete rout' of the Samajwadi Party, the data suggested a close race between the two at that level. ■

HT scores in Delhi NCR and Mumbai

According to the latest round (2017) of the Indian Readership Survey released recently, *Hindustan Times* emerges as the largest brand in the most important English markets of Delhi plus Mumbai with a combined average issue readership or AIR (main + variant) of 24.4 lakh.

In Delhi-National Capital Region, *Hindustan Times* re-established itself as the undisputed No. 1 newspaper for the 15th time. *HT* continues to be the most read newspaper in Delhi-NCR with more than 16.2 lakh AIR, 36 per cent higher than *The Times of India,* making *TOI* a distant No. 2. *HT* has made strong inroads into Punjab and has emerged as the No. 1 newspaper of the region with an AIR of 2.7 lakh, powering ahead of *The Tribune* (2.4 lakh). In Mumbai, *HT* has grown its readership significantly once again to 8.3 lakh AIR, which is nearly 70 per cent of *TOI*. It is now the undisputed No. 2 daily in the city.

Hindustan with 5.2 crore total readers is the second largest paper in the country with dominance across its major markets. IRS 2017 re-affirmed *Hindustan* as the second largest newspaper in the country with an TR of 5.2 crore and AIR of 1.8 crore. *Hindustan* continues to be No.1 in Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand, and a strong No. 2 in UP and Delhi. These results are a clear reflection of *Hindustan's* aggressive expansion in UP/ Uttarakhand, and its dominance in the states of Bihar and Jharkhand.

Hindustan is published by Hindustan Media Ventures, a subsidiary of HT Media. *Mint* consolidates its position as the second largest business daily in India. *Mint*, HT Media's business daily, consolidated its No. 2 position among the leading business dailies in India with an AIR of 2.39 lakh. ■

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)

The dichotomy in Indian sensibility — sad, but true

What is the explanation then for a dichotomy in our sensibilities? Is it our hopelessness about the political system? Is it our tiredness with the terrible over-crowding? Is it that we are such die-hard traditionalists that unless our family elders say so, we cannot create and innovate beauty around us? **Samatha Sharma** lays this out as an open question to readers as she does not have an answer

I have travelled to a few countries to the east and to the west of India. It has come to my awareness lately that India is one of the dirtiest of countries. When you live inside of it, especially in its urban quarters, the open sewers, the men squatting on the beaches do not bring a sense of total revulsion. It seems like a part of the urban landscape. However, to return from a trip abroad really opens our eyes to the squalor.

Leave alone the Westerners calling us polluted, noisy and poor; that impression comes from their over-sanitised public spaces. What we need to learn from or look at is East Asia. They are closer to us in terms of affordability and culture. Even in comparison to Thailand or Bali, the Indian Sub-continent does very badly in terms of care and sensitivity in public spaces. Be it parks or beaches or roads or public transport.

Photos: Energy Clinic

Sadly, open sewers, men squatting on the beaches, etc do not bring a sense of total revulsion in us.

Our buses and trains continue to remain dirty and overflowing. The work done by our Railways to improve quality standards has been commendable. However, poor sanitation continues to happen. I think the blame for this should rest squarely on the shoulders of the people who use these services: Us.

Largely, we continue to be insensitive to garbage disposal or leaving toilets clean for others. Both the class hierarchy and the way housework is handled in most homes seems to me to be the reason for this apathy. To keep our houses clean we need a maid. We are taught that someone else will always pick up after us. Similarly in public spaces, the middle class is waiting for the working class to pick up after them. And the working class does not seem to be able to come up with final solutions. Hence, for the amount of cleaning we do as a nation we seem to be getting nowhere in terms of cleanliness.

Once I was traveling in the AC coach of a long distance train. There were young and old people gazing into their cell phones or laptops. As is the pass time on trains, each of us consumed a lot of snacks. Now, the wrappers of the snacks packets were being dropped onto the floor of our coach. I suppose under the assumption that the railway cleaners would come to sweep the floor. This continued for a whole day till there was garbage all over the floor. No one batted an eyelid.

The writer says she would love to see jasmine flowers sold on roadsides wrapped in leaves.

Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

To me this was a revelation as to how garbage is being created in our country and how we train ourselves to be in denial of it. Safely throwing the responsibility onto someone else.

What is in direct contradiction to our insensitivity around public hygiene is our intense sensitivity towards personal hygiene. We clean and mop our floors daily. I do not know any other part of the world in which that happens. We wash, starch, iron our clothes on a regular basis.

Again, unusually fastidious, in comparison to most of the world which seems to have taken en masse to the jeans and T-shirt. Indeed the attention we pay to our costume is phenomenal.

Take the sari. First we pick a sari material from about a hundred choices. Next we pick a matching blouse and a matching inner skirt. Next we get the blouse stitched to our exact size at the tailors. There is even a small piece of cloth called the sari-falls that is matched to colour and patiently stitched on the sari. It stuns me that a person who provides such exquisite attention to personal beauty turns a blind eye to the surrounding ugliness.

I would like to dream, however. Maybe if one attempts to care for public spaces there would systems that would support such care and encourage it. For example, I would love to see the jasmine flowers sold on roadsides wrapped in banana leaves. Not in environmentally unfriendly plastic bags. That would be small but precious win for me. ■

(The writer is an artist and alternative therapist based in Chennai. She runs the Energy Clinic.)

How not to educate our schoolchildren

Where are we headed with such syllabuses as we have at present, especially as we are also without the teachers who can teach outside the book, wonders veteran journalist and author **S. Muthiah,** who, for over 40 years now, has been teaching, mainly college students and graduates, Journalism, Public Relations and Printing

I am not a school teacher. The students I have taught have come through various high school systems, the majority from state syllabus schools, a few from CBSE schools and even fewer from ICSE schools. To say there is a gap in quality between those from the first-named institutions and the rest is putting it mildly. What is sad is that even after college, given the indifferent way tertiary education is offered these days in the hundreds of mushrooming but recognised institutions that have sprung up, the majority of the first group of students are found unemployable by organisations around the country.

There was a time when in one highly rated institution I used to feel at the end of the course that a substantial part of the second and third groups would go abroad, the rest of them and the very best of the first group would go into the private sector, and the rest of the SSLC group would wind up in low-level government jobs or in no jobs at all. Where does the fault lie?

For the past 50 years, even before teaching part-time but while recruiting so-called qualified personnel for a factory, I've been bemoaning the standard of education in schools, particularly SSLC schools. Since the 1970's, as head of a publishing house, as an office-bearer of the Indian Cartographers' Association, the Indian Geography Teachers' Association, INTACH Tamil Nadu, the Madras Booksellers' and Publishers' Association, and as a life member of the Tamil Nadu History Congress and visiting faculty at Anna, Madras and SRM Universities, I have been writing to the secretaries of Education, making certain suggestions regarding high school curriculums. There are not even responses to these letters.

The general drift of these letters has been that if we are to turn out employable college graduates, we have to produce better high school graduates. These graduates have to be focused not only on Maths and the Sciences (and Accountancy, if from the Commerce stream) but must be all-round students as knowledgeable in the Humanities as they are presumed to be in Maths, Physics and Chemistry/Biology.

In my day, History, Geography, Nature Study/ Environmental Science, and Civics-and-Constitution were compulsorily taught as separate subjects from Class 3 till Class 10 by specialist teachers, not grouped together as Social Studies, taught by an ad hoc teacher. The studies in the first three subjects, if adopted to India, must follow this scheme: Class 1): City/town/local area of the school; 2): District; 3): State; 4): South, North, East or West India depending on the school's location; 5): Rest of India; 6): South and Southeast Asia; 7): Rest of Asia; 8&9): Rest of the World. The heritage and environment of every student's domicile must be known to him/her, leading him/her to a later and better appreciation of these features in the country and the wider world.

Secondly, the English language for teachers as well as students must be strongly focused on, whatever be the medium of instruction in the school. There must be specialised training for teachers in Communicative English and they would need to pass on the knowledge to the children. Children must be ready to answer in English questions about their subject/interest asked in English. In fact, they would need to be prepared to ask questions and carry on a dialogue in the medium of instruction as well as in English.

Also compulsory must be moral instruction/ ethics, a vocational subject chosen from three or four options offered (carpentry, motor vehicle or electrical engineering, farming, needlework, nursing, weaving, etc), physical education, and sports. Every student needs to learn to be hands-on and also appreciate the dignity of labour. They also need to develop values, and healthy bodies with healthy minds. If there are no grounds for sport, space can be made for indoor games like table tennis, squash, wrestling, boxing, gymnastics, volleyball, basketball and badminton, for example.

And last but not least, there must be a library in each school with a variety of books and every child must be encouraged to read at least one book a week. It was from such reading that I got my first lessons in history and language.

Each of the four points listed warrant expounding at length, but all I wish to add at the moment is that most schools in advanced countries follow a rather similar pattern of education and this was

Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

There is so much more to life than competition and success

Why can't we just be our natural selves instead of being forced to compete every time, to defeat, to win and to succeed at the cost of others, wonders **N. Padma**

Everyone born needs to be looked after, nurtured, cared for, encouraged, and supported – through life. Each one of us makes a contribution to society, whatever it be. Each person's contribution matters, each of us have a role to perform. We are similar in many ways. For example, we are all eager to know what is happening, we continuously seek information, we try and integrate accumulated knowledge and wish to keep ourselves up-to-date. But basically, we are all different and so comparisons are best avoided.

. Unfortunately, jobs and professions are graded – some are considered superior, others inferior. Similarly, people too, based on region, religion, caste, etc. A class system is thus willy-nilly fostered. If we look at our natural selves, each one of us is inherently loving, kind, compassionate, good, intelligent, committed to justice, and fun loving. By nature, we care for one another, care for the environment, enjoy a cooperative relationship, and enjoy living too.

Our inherent attitude is to see that everything goes well for all. Our capacity in many ways is limitless.

However, we have been nurtured and conditioned to compete with one another, excel, defeat and surpass others. We are always compared with another person. We are being evaluated all the time. In the process, we become victims. This happens right from elementary school. Children are compared with other children and judged and valued. We are sometimes taught to look at our own friends, college mates and fellow beings as opponents and obstacles to our success.

When we compete, there are winners and losers. We lose the joy of being together; we are deprived of the joy of working together. Competition makes us suspicious of others; we hesitate sharing things or feelings with them. And, often, we suffer from poor self-worth. For children, it is about being deprived of the joys of childhood.

The fear of losing makes us afraid of taking risks and of being ridiculed. We forego our creativity. Innovation is restricted. The fear of winning or losing can have dangerous effects; it can mar you psychologically.

When will we ever realise all this?

(The writer is a teacher in the primary in Kendriya Vidyalaya, Ponmalai, Trichy.)

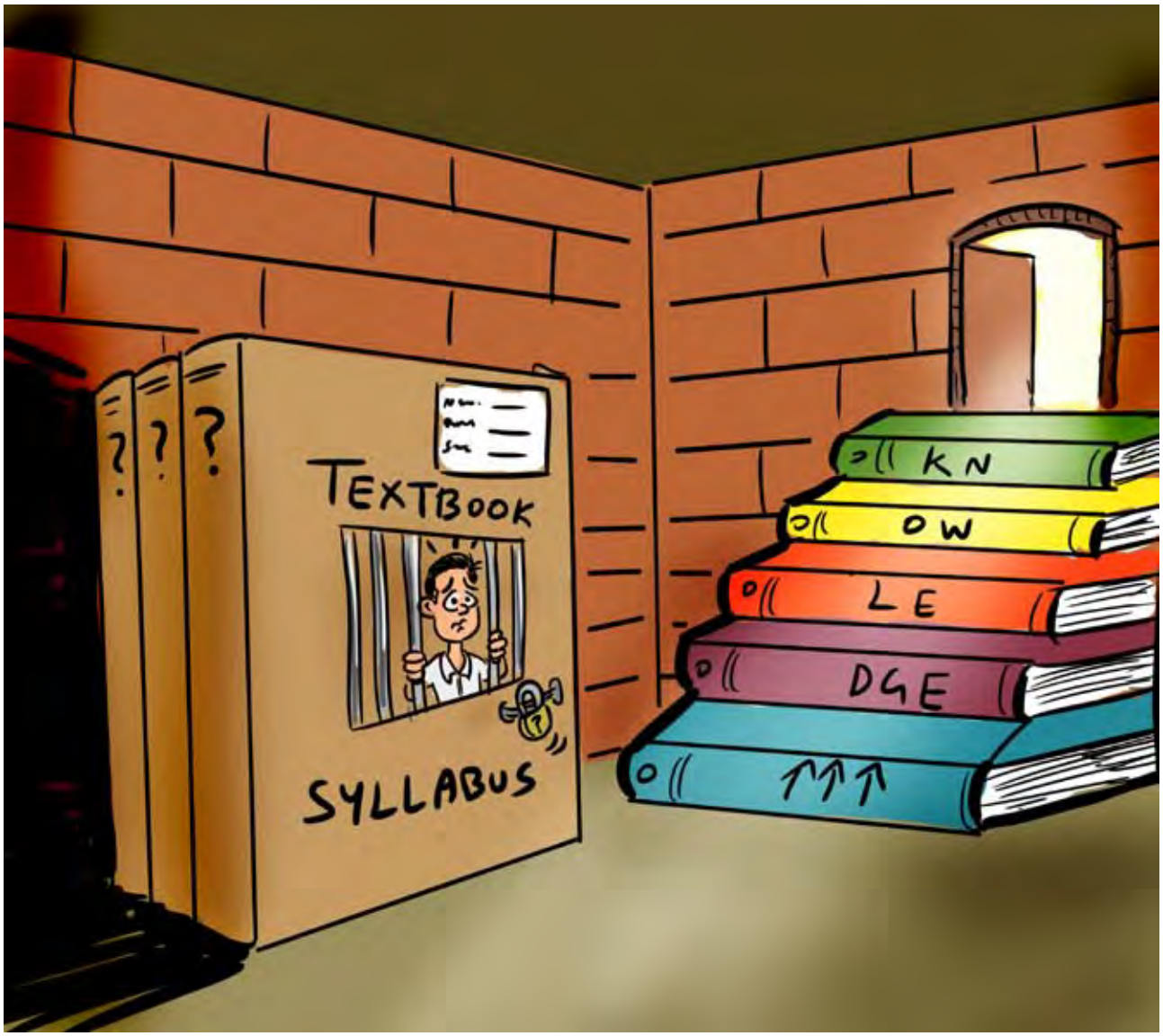


Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

the case in private schools (the so-called public schools) in India, till they got enamoured of the SSLC to be able to participate in the rat-race for college admission.

One last point. Even if it is said the present Social Studies syllabuses are more than adequate to turn out an all-round student, this blinkered view is in effect saying that about 50 History or Geography topics can be covered in a year in about 120 classes. Ask yourself then can such compression – into a list of facts – really **teach** a child a subject like the Cholas in two hours or does it only enable the child to 'by-heart' the list of facts for exams. Are discussion and understanding of a 1500-year-old kingdom not necessary? Closer home, shouldn't heritage, environmental and civic issues be taught from the point of view of being put into practice and not just to pass exams? ■

(The writer, educated in Ceylon, India and the US, has been a journalist for more than 60 years. He is a prolific writer of non-fiction and a chronicler of the European era in South India, with a focus on Madras. He is the author of over 40 books, has been writing a weekly column for The Hindu *for over 12 years and is the editor of* Madras Musings, *a fortnightly.)*

What students think about school education

Nandini Voice for the Deprived, a Tamil Nadu-based non-governmental organisation (nandinivoice.com) recently organised an essay competition for school and college students in Tamil Nadu on what is needed to improve standards of school education in Tamil Nadu. **N.S. Venkataraman** sent us the findings

The objective of conducting the essay competition was to provide an opportunity to the students to indicate their views on the present state of school education in Tamil Nadu and provide suggestions with regard to the changes and improvement needed. The Tamil Nadu Government has now taken some special steps to introduce reform measures for school education in Tamil Nadu and appointed an expert committee to evolve recommendations. The recommendations of the expert committee have been announced.

While the expert committee has consulted educationists, parents, teachers, politicians and government officials in framing its recommendations, it appears that it has not consulted the students and has not given opportunities to the student community to submit their views on the subject. Through the essay competition, the students have expressed themselves and have come out with original views and praiseworthy suggestions, which should be duly considered in framing the school education policy by expert committee and Government of Tamil Nadu.

Among the participants, 92 per cent were girls and rest boys; 56 per cent of those who participated were school students, the rest college students. The views of the students are being submitted to Tamil Nadu Government for its consideration. Highlights of the observations and suggestions of the students are given below.

Reform, a repetitive exercise

In the past few years, several reform measures have been initiated by Government of Tamil Nadu to improve the quality of school education in the state. The very fact that reform measures are now considered necessary in 2017 after so many reforms earlier, only highlight the fact that the past reform measures have not achieved the desired ends. While implementing the new reforms in 2017-18, it is necessary to investigate, before repeating the exercise, as to why the past reform measures have not benefitted to the level of expectations.

Too many systems for school education

There are different kind of systems for school education in Tamil Nadu such as state board, CBSE, ICSE, Matriculation, Anglo Indian system. It is necessary that the system of school education in Tamil Nadu should be only one and should be tuned with national trend. Different types of system should be abolished as they serve no special purpose and only CBSE system of education should be adopted in Tamil Nadu, so that the performance of Tamil Nadu students can be evaluated at an all-India level and they can compete.

Private vs government schools

The objective and goal of the private schools and government-owned and government-aided schools are the same. There need be no conflict of interests between them. The only difference is the accountability, which is much less in government schools compared to private schools.

Private schools are often accused of being run as business model with profit motive and collecting exorbitant fees from the students under various pretext. This is a fact.

In Indian society, there is bound to be disparity in income between various families for long time to come. To meet the needs of students from lower income group, government owned and government aided schools are absolutely necessary. Let those who can afford to pay go to the private schools, if they want.

The economically poor students complain that education in private schools have become beyond their reach. As the standard of education in private schools are better than in the government schools, students from the lower-income group who have to go to government schools feel that they are deprived of quality education. The fault lies not in the type of ownership of the school nor in syllabus. The problemslies in the poor management of government schools by the government.

Basics of syllabus sound

Repeatedly, once in every three or four years, the government is tampering with the syllabus in various classes. This is unnecessary. Subjects such as Chemistry and Physics do not change and where

Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

is the need to tamper with the syllabus? In the name of changing the syllabus, the government is introducing more advanced aspects of subject in the school curriculum, thinking that this would improve the standard of education. In doing so, government is not taking into consideration, the capacity of the cross section of the young teenage students, who have to understand such complex subjects in short period of time.

Better syllabus need not mean a more intensive syllabus, which school students often find difficult to understand and appreciate but have to blindly accept and reproduce. It is often seen that some of lessons in the subjects taught in the schools are repeated in degree level classes.

Further, considering the fact that students opt for different types of courses at the degree level, many of the advanced subjects taught to the school students are not useful to them in the long run.

Government schools drag down performance

It has to be admitted that the overall performance and standard of school education in Tamil Nadu look dismal, mainly due to poor performance of government schools, which are in large number and cater to thousands of students. The performance and standard in government aided schools, however, are better than government owned schools, corporation and panchayat schools.

However, it is reported that the government has decided not to support any more number of government aided schools, which is an unfortunate and a negative decision.

Families from lower income group often admit their children in government schools reluctantly and helplessly, as they cannot pay fees demanded by private schools. Even the officials in education department and teachers working in the government schools do not want to send their children to government schools.

This makes it amply clear that the conditions in government schools are far from desirable level. Any attempt to reform school education without reforming the administration and management of the government schools would be

Aditanar's contribution to Tamil in Class 11 syllabus

The illustrious life of Si Pa Aditanar, founder of the Daily Thanthi Group of publications, and his contribution to Tamil language and the newspaper industry will be included in the revised syllabus for Class 11 students.

"The contribution of the founder of *Daily Thanthi* to the Tamil language, and his efforts to make news accessible to the common people, will now be a part of the new syllabus for Class 11," said Education Minister K.A. Sengottaiyan recently. The minister pointed out that through the *Daily Thanthi* newspaper, Aditanar made Tamil simple and accessible to everybody, enabling those from remote villages to get news much faster, understand it easily, besides encouraging and improving their reading skills.

A senior school education department official said, "The lives and journeys of leaders from Tamil Nadu will be part of the new syllabus and Si Pa Aditanar is certainly one of the most significant Tamil leaders. He has played a pivotal role in making Tamil language easily read by all."

Anandakrishnan, who heads the new TN Curriculum Framework Committee, had earlier said they would expose students to contemporary Tamil literature. "Lives of great leaders will also be taught to students," he said.

Si Pa Aditanar, a prominent lawyer and politician, launched *Daily Thanthi* on November 1, 1942. The newspaper rapidly grew to become the largest circulated daily in Tamil Nadu, and the fifth largest read newspaper in the country. He was the founder of the Naam Tamilar Party, served as the member of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly for four terms and was the Speaker of the Assembly during 1967–68. He was also Minister for Cooperation in M. Karunanidhi's cabinets of 1969 and 1971.

In his memory, two annual Tamil literary awards have been set up. *Daily Thanthi* recently celebrated its 75th anniversary. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who graced the function, lauded the efforts of Si Pa Aditanar and his contribution to society.

(Courtesy: DT Next*)*

Statement about ownership and other particulars about"VIDURA" the English Quarterly Newspaper, Chennai, as required to be published under Section 19-D Sub-Section (b) of the Press and Registration of Books Act read with the Rule 8 of the Registration of Newspapers (Central Rules) 1956

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I, Sashi Nair, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Sashi Nair

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waste of time and is bound to end up as an exercise in futility.

No doubt, government spends as much as around Rs 30,000 crore a year in supporting education. Most of such expenses of government are spent towards providing freebies to the students in government-owned and government-aided schools, such as uniforms, textbooks, geometry boxes, cycles, laptops, shoes, free bus pass etc. Money spent in improving the facilities in the schools are much less, which is great disservice to the poor students. Teachers in government schools are well paid. But they often resort to agitation and go for public protests and indulge in strikes, not caring that they should be role models to the student community.

No time for introspection, assimilation

Students are locked in a closed system in both private and government schools. Education is imparted to the students only to get academic qualification. Not knowledge for the sake of knowledge but knowledge only to get grades in the exams. In several of the schools, in the 11th Standard, only 12 Standard lessons are taught skipping the 11th Standard syllabus, as there is no public exam for 11th standard.

Crowded with the heavy syllabus and with little time for anything, the students rarely visit the library in the schools and do extra reading. Most of the schools have libraries but there is no period for students to sit and read in them. Some schools even refuse to give books to the students to take home for reading. While framing the syllabus, it is necessary to provide extra time to students for introspection and assimilation.

School exams a joke

It is strange to see so many students get centum in so many subjects including language. Inflation of marks is so high that it has become difficult to grade the students by way of ranks, forcing the government to suspend announcement of ranks itself after the examination. It is often seen that students with several centums have done poorly in professional courses. Examination systems are faulty. Often, the questions are straightaway selected from the textbooks and with lot of choice of questions. Students who can memorise score marks without even understanding the basic concepts.

Instead of taking the Plus-two marks alone for eligibility for higher courses, the average marks of 10, 11 and 12 Standards should be considered. Testing and marking systems need recognise the original contribution of the students in terms of creativity.

It is certainly not possible to impart ideal kind of education for all students in today's scenario in Tamil Nadu, as the family and economic backgrounds of students are different and the standards of teaching in schools vary significantly. However, it is certainly possible to improve the overall standards of education by paying greater attention at micro levels to various issues.

The government owned and government aided schools have very big role to play, as the students from lower income group often in deprived conditions study in these schools and they need support. ■

(The writer is the founder trustee of Nandini Voice For The Deprived, formed in 1995, which aims to highlight the problems of downtrodden and deprived people and support their cause.)

Daily Thanthi, Lokmat, Manorama top regional dailies

The latest Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2017 has once again reiterated the power of the regional press. The survey covered a full year sample size of 3.2 lakh households, a sample size increase by an unprecedented 34 per cent over the previous edition of the study in 2014. Among the regional players, Tamil newspaper *Daily Thanthi* and Marathi daily *Lokmat* command highest readership followed by *Malayala Manorama*. According to IRS 2017 data, *Daily Thanthi* is the largest read language daily in the country.

Telugu daily *Eenadu* is the fourth largest read language daily followed by Bengali newspaper *Anandabazar Patrika* at No. 5. Tamil daily *Dinakaran*, Malayalam daily *Mathrubhumi*, Gujarati daily *Gujarat Samachar*, Tamil daily *Dinamalar* and Marathi daily *Daily Sakalare* are also among India's top10 regional dailies

Among regional magazines, Malayalam fortnightly magazine *Vanitha* continued to be the largest read regional language magazine in the country with a huge margin, according to the latest readership survey IRS 2017; the total readership of the magazine stood at 6126000. The No. 2 magazine is Tamil Weekly *AnandaVikatan*, which had not featured in the top-10 list of regional language magazines in IRS 2014. Malayalam monthly *Mathrubhumi Arogya Masika* is at No. 3 followed by Tamil weekly *Kumudam* at No. 4 and Malayalam Weekly *Mathrubhumi Thozhilvartha* is at No. 5.

The latest IRS 2017 Report also offers new readership metrics. Apart from the standard and well-established Average Issue Readership metric, one can now look at data from the perspective of Total Readership (TR), and Readership of publications by timeframes of Last seven days and Last three days. These new metrics have been introduced to provide a true representation of the changing consumption habits among Newspaper readers. ■

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)

Why does sport get such low priority in the media?

Young Indians should not remain content with watching sports events on television or reading about them. They must participate in sports with passion and a commitment to excel. The role of the media, both electronic and print, in promoting sports among youth, is critical, says **Alok Srivastava.** The fact that sports is given such low priority by the media is a key reason for Indian sportspersons not being able to give good account of themselves at international levels, he says

India's demography is turning young. Nearly two-thirds of India's population is below 35 years of age and over 50 per cent of the people are below the age of 25. No doubt this is an abundant human resource available, but are all stakeholders, including media, doing enough to efficiently engage them and instill a love of sports in them? Are Indian youth healthy enough, with the necessary energy and stamina, to participate actively in sports?

According to the recently released National Family Health Survey 2015-16 (NFHS-4), in India, nearly one-fourth of men aged between 15 and 49 years are anaemic and around 19 per cent are overweight or obese. Among women, the situation is much worse – more than half are anaemic and nearly 21 per cent are overweight. Estimates released in 2015 by the World Health Organization (WHO) show that the prevalence of obesity among adolescents (13-18 years) has grown from 16 to 29 per cent over the past five years.

One of the major concerns is the growth of lifestyle disorders. Societal changes due to globalisation, economic reforms and removal of trade restrictions have contributed significantly to disorders in childhood and adolescence. Children, adolescents and youth, rather than engaging in outdoor sports, are now pursuing sedentary activities such as watching TV or spending time with gadgets such as tablets and, smartphones, on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and video games. They binge on junk foods too. According to an article by Manu Raj and R. Krishna Kumar in the book, *Obesity in Children & Adolescents*, every hour of sedentary activity increases the chance of obesity in adolescents and children.

No doubt, since early the 1990s, with the expansion of cable and satellite TV channels, exposure to national and international sports events has grown. Now sports events are not limited to youth of metros or big cities. Even those living in towns and villages can watch live telecasts or repeat telecasts of various sports events.

Thanks to television, in the last two or three decades, sports other than cricket, such as football, hockey, kabaddi, tennis and badminton, have seen a meteoric rise in audience and viewership among adolescents and youth. As per National Youth Readership Survey report (2010), television remains the most popular source of information for the youth, followed by newspapers. A literate youth spends an average 98 minutes daily viewing TV, 32 minutes on newspaper reading, 44 minutes reading magazines, 70 minutes surfing the Net, and 61 minutes listening to the radio.

However, while 54 per cent of the youth view television for entertainment and 22 per cent for news and current affairs, about 63 per cent read newspapers to gather news and information on current events and only 10 per cent read for entertainment. Young Indians should not remain content with watching sports events on television or reading about them. They must participate in sports with passion and a commitment to excel.

The role of the media, both electronic and print, in promoting sports among youth, is critical. Television coverage remained confined mainly to cricket matches at the international level till 10-15 years ago, and that too of men's cricket only. Apart from this, to some extent other major sports events such as Olympics, Asian and Commonwealth Games, Football and Hockey World Cups, Tennis and Badminton Grand Slams and select international athletics' meets were covered by television channels.

In the past decade, privately sponsored and promoted leagues/ tournaments for cricket, football, hockey, kabaddi and badminton are getting live coverage by some sports TV channels. However, the coverage of sports by the print media (mainly newspapers) continues to be consigned to the last couple of pages, many often disregarding local sports. Radio and TV news bulletins also relegate sports-related news to the end of the broadcast.

Such positioning seems to reflect neglect or less importance being given to sports and related topics. It reflects the importance of sports in

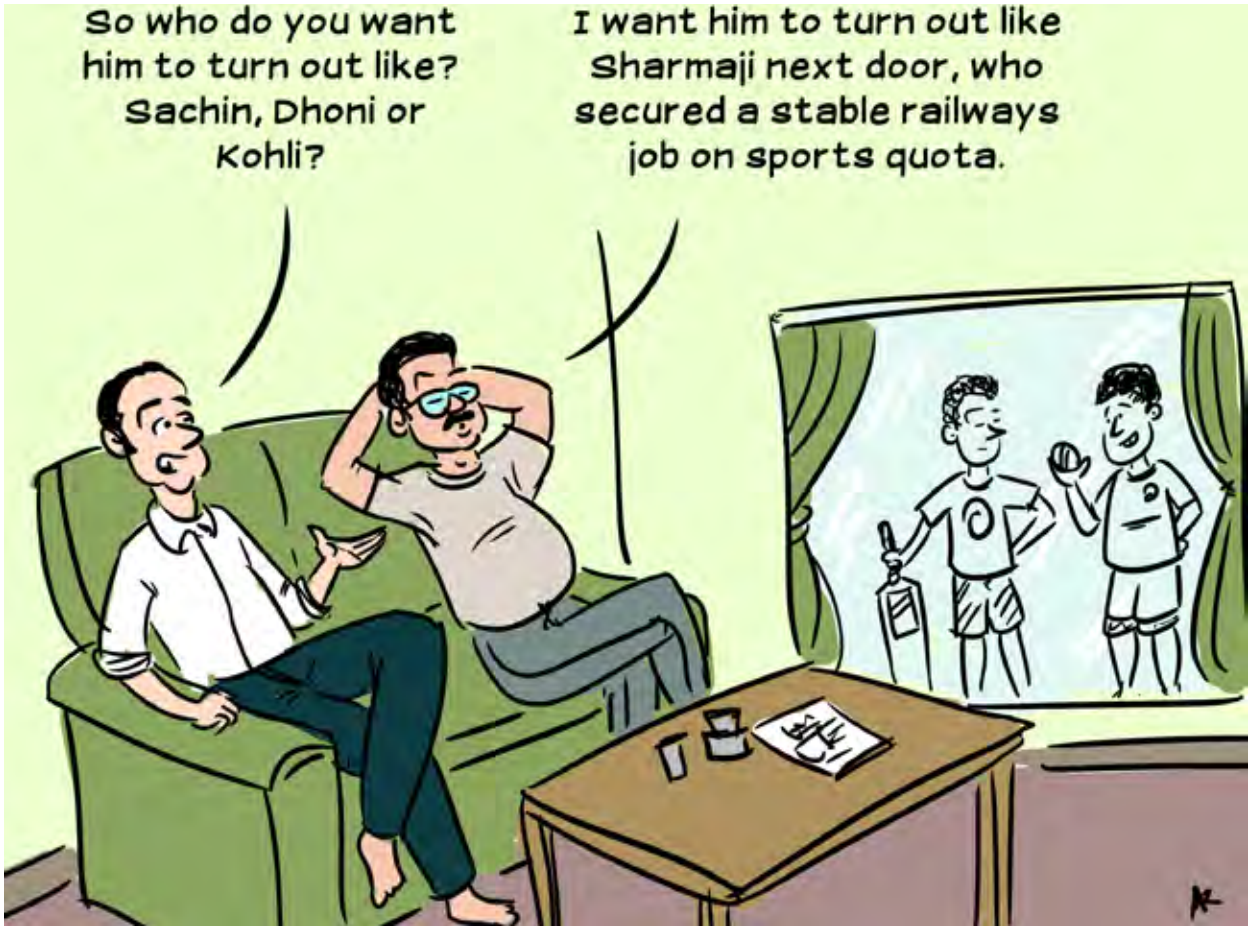

So who do you want him to turn out like? Sachin, Dhoni or Kohli?
I want him to turn out like Sharmaji next door, who secured a stable railways job on sports quota.

Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

the common man's life. As a Hindi saying goes, *Padhoge likhoge banoge nawaab, kheloge koodoge toh hoge kharaab* – if you study hard, you will excel in life, but if you spend time on games, you will waste your life. Parents often use the saying to motivate their children to focus on academics.

There is no denying that a sportsperson has a shorter 'shelf-life' than those engaged in other kinds of activity. Parents worry about how their children will sustain themselves once they pass the playing age. Most people think of sports as a hobby to be pursued or, at best, a route to a good college or job via the sports quota. No doubt, education is important for leading a good life, but focusing on a sport with the aim of excelling in it is equally praiseworthy.

The fact that sports (except for men's cricket to an extent) is given such low priority is a key reason for Indian sportspersons not being able to give good account of themselves at international levels in spite of being a country which has the advantage of a huge youth demographic.

The media has a catalytic role to play in ensuring recognition and respect for sports in the country. Sports and related topics should be given as much importance on the front page or at the start of news bulletins, as politics, economics or crime.

Newspapers can think of dedicating one day a week for putting sports-based news on their front pages, and focusing on the topic in editorials, in order to motivate children and also parents to encourage their children to take up sports seriously. TV News channels should air discussions on sports related issues on prime time (between 8 pm and 10 pm) at least once every week. Such small but concrete initiatives by the media will not only sensitise citizens, but also put national and state governments and policy makers on their toes, to work sincerely to improve sports facilities across the country.

Of course, the media's efforts should be suitably supported by other key stakeholders. Government agencies should ensure availability of sports facilities in each district. Corporate houses can help, too, by adopting districts to provide sports facilities as part of the corporate social responsibility initiative. ■

(The writer is director, CMS Social, Centre for Media Studies, a multi-disciplinary social research and advocacy organisation.)

Invest in a healthy generation for the years ahead

Infectious and childhood diseases continue to be significant problems, especially in the Empowered Action Group States, and are responsible for the high burden of premature deaths in children under five years. **Soumya Swaminathan** says if we do not invest in health, we will face a future with huge healthcare bills and non-productive individuals

For the first time in India, disease was mapped at a state level by the Indian Council of Medical Research, Public Health Foundation of India and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation in a report that was released late last year. It found that non-communicable disease and injuries have together overtaken infectious and childhood diseases in terms of the disease burden in every state of the country. Though the more developed states in the South saw the transition about 30 years ago, the poorer states are seeing the change happen over the past few years.

So, the reality that India awakens to in a New Year is that it faces a rising burden of cardiovascular diseases, cancer, mental health problems and chronic respiratory diseases, while not being free from infections like TB and diarrhoea. In fact, injuries, falls and suicide account for 12 per cent of the disease burden and are also increasing yearly. The state-level Disease Burden study reveals that three types of risks are the most common in the country: under-nutrition, air pollution, and a group of risks causing cardiovascular disease.

Child and maternal under-nutrition is still the single largest risk factor in India, responsible for 15 per cent of the total disease burden in 2016. Under-nutrition increases the risk of contracting common infections, and stunting in early childhood permanently affects physical and cognitive development. The burden of under-nutrition is 12 times higher per person in India than in China. While the risk factor is relatively worse in the major northern EAG States and Assam, it is the leading risk in over three-fourths of Indian States.

Second, air pollution levels in India are among the highest in the world, making it the second leading risk factor that caused 10 per cent of the total disease burden in India. We know that it increases the risk of cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases, respiratory infections and cancer, and are learning more about its other effects, like potentially inducing diabetes and lowering birth weights.

The burden of outdoor air pollution has increased in all parts of the country since 1990 due to pollutants from power production, industry, vehicles, construction and waste burning. However, the burden of household air pollution has reduced due to decreasing use of solid fuels for cooking and schemes such as the PM Ujjwala Yojana, which offers subsidised LPG connections to poor families. Air pollution is higher in north India, with the vast majority of the population exposed to this risk, but it is considerable even in the southern States.

The third major group of risks include unhealthy diet, high blood pressure, high blood sugar, high

India faces a grim health horizon at the dawn of 2018.

Illustration: stock.com/Enis Aksoy

cholesterol and overweight, which together increase the risk of heart attacks, stroke and kidney failure. These factors accounted for a tenth of the total disease burden in India in 1990, but in 2016, this increased to 25 per cent. The rates of diabetes and obesity are increasing in all states and, worryingly, the poor are showing accelerated rates. High blood pressure affects about a quarter of adults – and most are unaware of it. Unhealthy diets – rich in carbohydrate and poor in protein, fibre and micronutrients – are a double whammy, contributing to both malnutrition and obesity!

Luckily, all these are reversable and preventable risk factors. We need a concerted multi-sectoral response that includes the health, food, agriculture, environment, petroleum, housing and urban development sectors and cooperation between the Central and state governments. We have a choice – we can invest now to ensure a generation of healthy Indians, or face a future with huge healthcare bills and non-productive individuals. Besides, these interventions are good not just for humans, but for the environment as well, so it's a win-win. ■

(Courtesy: The Hindu BusinessLine. *The writer is deputy director-general, Programmes, with the World Health Organization, Geneva.)*

Dainik Jagran most read newspaper In India

Dainik Jagran is the top read publication in India with total readership of over 7 crore, according to the Indian Readership Survey 2017 released on January 18, 2017 after a gap of four years. The second and third most read publications in all languages are Hindustan and *Amar Ujala* with over 5.2 crore and 4.6 crore respectively.

In English language publications, *The Times of India* is the top ranking publication in readership with over 1.3 crore readership, according to IRS 2017, while *Hindustan Times* with over 68 lakhs readership is the second most read English newspaper with *The Hindu* English securing third position with a readership of over 53 lakhs. Interestingly, *The Economic Times* despite being a business newspaper came up with a readership of a little over 31 lakhs leaving behind other big publications such as *The Indian Express* with 15 lakhs and *Mumbai Mirror* with over 18 lakhs.

India Today (English) and *India Today* (Hindi) emerged as the most read magazines, as per the IRS 2017 data, with a total readership of over 79 lakhs and 71 lakhs, respectively. *Samanya Gyan Darpan* (Hindi) holds the third position with a readership of over 68 lakhs.

IRS 2017 covered over 600 publications, 71 product categories (at penetration and brand level), covering 28 states and 4 union territories, 95 cities with 5 Lakh+ population, 91 districts and 101 district clusters. Around 330000 households (urban 2.14 lakh and rural 1.16 lakh) have been included as compared to 235000 sample size in IRS 2013. ■

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)

Sachin Kalbag is executive editor, *HT*

Sachin Kalbag has been appointed executive editor of *Hindustan Times.* He will be based in Mumbai. Kalbag will join *Hindustan Times* from *The Hindu,* where he was resident editor of Mumbai. He has previously been editor of *Hindustan Times* as well. From 2008 to 2011, Kalbag was senior editor at *Mail Today*. He has also worked with *Daily News* and *Analysis* (DNA). ■

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)

Porn proliferation and sex crimes – a worrisome link

Media coverage of violence against women has indeed yielded results – several cases have been resolved, and culprits punished. However, a fresh development has added a worrisome dimension to the problem, says **Bharat Dogra,** pointing to studies revealing the close link between screen porn and real life sexual violence. Available evidence points to the fact that there is no room for self-denial regarding the potentially disastrous implications of the proliferation of pornography on the safety of women and children. The evidence should be clearly examined in an unbiased way and corrective action initiated at appropriate levels, he says

At a recent workshop on the role of media and violence against women, activists working to prevent gender-based violence told journalists that media coverage of violence against women had succeeded to an extent in checking the problem. However, they reported that the growing trend of men and even young boys accessing sexually explicit material on their mobile phones had complicated the scenario.

The activists, mainly women, were interacting with journalists at the workshop, which was organised in a village. The women, equipped with a good grasp of the fast changing rural scene, told reporters that they had no control over the new development. Extended exposure to sexually explicit material led to changes in the way they saw women and this, in turn, increased

Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

Children given a chance to think aloud

If someone touches a child – it may be just on the hand – and the child is not comfortable with it, then it is child sexual abuse. Bring perpetrators of child abuse to trial under appropriate laws, such as the POCSO Act. If they are tried under other laws, they get to walk free. Even if a girl is over 18, it is wrong to pressure her to get married if she doesn't want to do so. It is important to stress gender parity right from the school years. Girls, don't limit yourselves, don't think that jobs like driving are meant only for men.

These were not words born of the wisdom of age. They were comments and suggestions given by a group of children, both boys and girls, aged between 12 and 17. Some of them had just passed out from government schools and were pursuing college degrees, others were still in government schools. They were participating in the First World Children's Day organised by the UNICEF in Chennai on November 20. It was a day 'for the children, by the children'.

At a special function organised to mark the occasion (this is the first time that the UN has designated a Day for children), a panel of children interacted freely with Job Zachariah, chief, UNICEF State Office for Tamil Nadu and Kerala; M.P. Nirmala, chairperson, Tamil Nadu Commission for the Protection of Child Rights; and Trisha Krishnan, popular south Indian actor who was conferred the Celebrity Advocate status by UNICEF on the occasion. The bright and vocal audience of over 50 children had no inhibitions in asking or responding to questions either.

"Cases of sexual abuse against children are on the rise. Suicide among adolescents is growing. Half the children in both Tamil Nadu and Kerala are anaemic," said Zachariah. "Child labour and child marriages are still happening despite laws against them. We need to give space for our children to speak – in schools, in families, in society. They will have lots of suggestions and solutions to problems," he stressed. "History will ask us what we have done to solve issues of children. If we take action, India will be a better place, not only for kids but also for adults."

Nirmala, delivering the special address, gave statistics on malnutrition, child morality and child abuse. Accepting the status of Celebrity Advocate, Trisha Krishnan said she was gratified at being chosen for the honour. She said she would like to create awareness on health, education and nutrition, and made a commitment to work towards making Tamil Nadu and Kerala malnutrition and open defecation free, reducing anaemia, and doing away with child labour and child marriage.

Sugata Roy, communication specialist, UNICEF State Office for Tamil Nadu and Kerala, said all over the world, children were taking over media houses, legislatures, stock exchanges, school administration, police stations and other public offices in a symbolic act, to focus attention on critical issues faced by children, and also to give them an opportunity to assert their views and determine their own potential.

At the Chennai event, children and adults quizzed each other on topics such as corporal punishment by parents (there's no law against it in India, clarified Zachariah – but there's no law permitting it either, pointed out Nirmala), the Child Helpline, the No-Go-Tell mantra (an action plan when a child feels threatened), teenage love, the reasons for school dropouts (poor access to schools, particularly for girls, and lack of facilities like separate toilets for boys and girls), child marriage, and the negative influence of films on young minds.

Reported by **Susan Philip**

the possibility of violence against women, they said.

There has been much research and debate on the extent to which pornography promotes sexual violence against or harassment of women and children. Some studies show a close link between screen porn and real-life sexual crimes. On the other hand, some sections are of the view that there is no connection between the two, arguing that many people who watch porn regularly don't commit any sexual offence.

However, journalists who heard the activists speak at the workshop were left in no doubt that a connection did exist. The activists attend to complaints from rural women on a daily basis. They have met traumatised women who told them that their husbands use their phones to show them clips of some form of sex which is culturally offensive or degrading, and tell them to copy such acts. That was a form of force, as marriages were breaking down if the women didn't cooperate, the activists said.

It is well documented that when alien influences appear suddenly and forcefully in traditional, conservative cultures, the impact can be very disruptive. There is no time to adjust and take corrective action so that the disruption can be reduced. In fact, at times even the need for corrective action is not realised, or the form of such action

decided upon till it is too late. This seems to be the case regarding the proliferation of pornography in many parts of India, including small towns and even villages. Internet connectivity on smartphones has perhaps speeded this up more than anything else, but other mediums have also been used.

To place the matter in perspective, let us consider some studies on this issue. Seiya Morita quoted a study in his widely discussed paper, Pornography, Prostitution and Women's Human Rights in Japan. The study was based on the answers given by persons accused of rape and indecent assault to the question whether, while watching a pornographic video, they felt like doing the same thing in real life. As much as 33 per cent of the men answered in the affirmative. The percentage was 50 among juvenile offenders.

Of course, it is true that different men react differently. Many men, perhaps a majority, may not commit any sexual violence despite consuming porn regularly. But those who deny any link between pornography and real life violence ignore the fact that even if a small percentage of those who are exposed to pornography indulge in actual sexual violence, it is disastrous, because the exposure is of such high level. Assuming that half a million men in a city consume porn and just 10 per cent of them are driven towards real life sexual violence, the figure is around 50,000!

It is in this context that the potential of porn proliferation to increase sexual crimes should be taken very seriously.

Another study in Japan tried to analyse trends in crime during the years which witnessed the first big increase in porn proliferation, particularly porn videos. It revealed that during the period, all other violent crimes decreased as a part of other wider trends in Japanese society, but sexual crimes increased.

In India, too, we see that the years of rapid proliferation of pornography have also been years of a big increase in sexual crimes against women and children. While there is a lot of anecdotal violence, the link between porn and sexual violence needs to be established by comprehensive studies. Police officials have been quoted by the print media from time to time as stating that the perpetrators of sexual crimes watched a lot of porn. Some offenders too have said as much. One very young offender recently confessed that he had not wanted to commit a sexual crime, but since he had been watching porn, he could not stop himself from attempting a similar act in real life.

Perhaps the most disturbing trend reported recently is that of preparing and selling video clips of rapes. There is reportedly very high demand for such material and it commands very high rates. Earlier, such videos were being prepared to blackmail the victim. Now, with filming having become very easy, it is being done simply for sale. In such clips, the face of the victim can generally be seen but the faces of the perpetrators are blurred. The crime is committed for profit but, in the process, the woman is subjected to untold degradation and suffering, and is scarred for life.

It is likely that the perpetrators of such crimes were themselves influenced by exposure to rape porn, probably pirated. These locally-created clips are likely to be even more influential in terms of driving consumers towards rape. There is indication that this may already be happening and is likely to burgeon unless urgent steps are taken to check the trend. ■

Vinay Kamat is new editor of *Mint*

Vinay Kamat, editor of *Khaleej Times,* Dubai has been appointed as the new editor for *Mint,* one of India's leading business and financial dailies. He will join the office on February 16, 2018. The post had been lying vacant since late September 2017 after Sukumar Ranganathan, was appointed to head Hindustan Times. Kamat is a postgraduate from the University of Banglore and holds 30 years of editorial experience with him, across platforms like print, magazines, digital and mobile. Prior to *Khaleej Times,* Kamat was the resident editor for *The Times of India*, Bangalore. He has also worked with *DNA* where he launched the broadsheet product in Mumbai and Bangalore. ■

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)

Why should a happy marriage be out of reach for disabled?

Disabled people don't have a problem expressing love, care, commitment and loyalty, the main components of a successful relationship. Yet, very few such people get partners of their choice, and a happy marriage is a distant dream for many, says **Rakhi Ghosh**

Wheelchair-bound Suchismita* was in her late 20s when she experienced feelings for a smart young man who was a colleague at the educational institute where she was working. They had the same qualifications, likes and dislikes, and this drew them to spend time together. However, when she expressed her feelings for him, he was unable to consider making a disabled person his life partner.

Suchismita wept for days. It was difficult for her to accept that she was rejected because she was disabled and therefore did not fit into a man's concept of a dream woman. "It took me months to come out from that phase of life even though I knew that it could happen, as in our society people still don't accept disabled persons as life partners. With the qualities I do possess, if I had not been disabled, he would not have rejected me," she says, her eyes growing watery at the memory of the hurt.

"When my parents searched for a groom for me, they always explained about my disability, but most prospective families turned me down, even if their own son was disabled. They look for able-bodied women to take care of their son and perform traditional roles of home-maker, wife and mother. A disabled woman can't fit into this frame," she says.

Asmita* has mild cerebral palsy. Her parents too dreamed of seeing their daughter settle down with a life partner. Her mother says, "Like other parents, we too started searching for grooms for our daughter through friends, newspaper advertisements and matrimony sites. But the mindsets of people have not yet changed towards disabled women. Even though she is earning and can take care of herself, she does not fit into the typical expectations of a *bahu* (daughter-in-law)."

Sucheta*, a disabled woman who works in the administrative department of a private company says, "Like every human being we have also feelings and emotions but, often, other people take advantage of us. If they get a hint that you harbour feelings for them, or have a crush on them, there is every chance that they will take advantage of it and later abuse or harass you".

Activist Sneha Mishra points out, "It is not that disabled persons are not getting married or sustaining relationships in our society. It is just that disabled men are more fortunate in this regard. Parents of disabled men often search for a bride from a lower economic background who will be willing to marry and take care of their son. However, in the case of a disabled girl, right from her childhood parents develop the misconception that disability is a problem when it comes to marriage, as people are only looking for the 'perfect' bride".

Disabled men are also subject to social taboos and find it difficult to find acceptance in love. Disabled rights activist and motivational

Photo: Jitendra Biswal

Jitendra and Shefali, who together overcame the odds.

Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

counselor Jitendra Biswal, who is a quadriplegic, explains, "Like any other young man of my age, I too had crush on a woman and waited for years to get the nod from her family to get married to her. But I was never accepted even though I am qualified and a successful entrepreneur." In his mid 40s, he met another woman, and he and Shefali are now living together. "This happened because we are both physically challenged and we understand each other," says Biswal.

Biswal recently acted in a film titled *The Desire*, which tells of a disabled person's desire for love and how he was rejected by his beloved on account of his disability. "The main components of a relationship are love, care, commitment and loyalty and disabled people don't have a problem expressing these," he stresses.

Many disabled people prefer partners who are also disabled. "We feel a disabled person will understand us better," says Sriya Rani Dei, a disabled woman who recently got married to a disabled man. Manoj Barik, who is visually challenged, agrees. "One can stay single or can get married; it is up to each one's choice. But, if a disabled person wants to get married she or he should choose a partner from the same group, because we don't need sympathy. Rather, the partner has to understand disability".

However, very few such people get partners of their choice, and a happy marriage is a distant dream for many. A study titled 'A profile of disability in Odisha – trends, development and dynamics 2012' by Swabhiman, a non-profit organisation, finds that many persons with disability (PwD) in the state enjoy the experience of marriage and family life. However, because of stigma and discrimination, lack of access to information and services, especially in sexual and reproductive health, many do not marry and have children.

There are various conflicting myths with respect to sexuality and disability prevalent in society which perpetuate and reinforce the marginalisation and discrimination of persons with disabilities and create an aversion and fear for marriage among PwDs, the study says. Most people don't realise that disabled women can lead active sex lives. There was a view that disabled women could not have sex or produce children, the study found.

The myth that PwDs will always give birth to children with disabilities stems from a lack of knowledge. Genetic disabilities

occur in only a small number of births and can occur even if parents do not have disabilities. PwDs should be provided access to information and counselling on the effects of pregnancy and child birth on their bodies, appropriate medical care during pregnancy and delivery, care for the child, genetic heredity issues and mental well-being.

According to the study, only 36.5 per cent of PwDs have life partners. The rest live solitary lives. These include people who are single, divorced, separated or widowed. People with visual impairment are most likely to find spouses, followed by those who have impaired mobility. Those who are hearing impaired are less likely to find partners than those with visual or mobility impairment, while mentally challenged people find it the most difficult.

Manoj, a bachelor, feels that of late, matrimony sites exclusively for disabled persons have been helpful in match-making with regard to PwDs. Earlier, parents or friends would choose partners for disabled persons but, often, such alliances failed due to lack of proper understanding. "However, you can register on these exclusive marriage sites and select a person suitable for you. But there should be proper discussion and meeting between the two persons before you solemnise the marriage," he cautions.

There are many qualified PwDs who are established in their careers, but choose to be single as the mindset of society towards the disabled has not yet changed. "Normal people don't see their ideal life partners as a disabled person, because PwDs are seen as unattractive and incompetent", says Biswal. ■

*These names have been changed to protect identity.

(The writer is a freelance journalist based in Bhubaneswar.)

Ramnath Goenka Journalism Award for Ravish Kumar

Ravish Kumar, senior executive editor, NDTV India won the Ramnath Goenka Excellence in Journalism Award in Hindi broadcast category and Congress MP Shashi Tharoor won the award for his book, *An Era of Darkness: The Age of British Empire in India*. While Rahul Kotiyal of Satyagrah.scroll.in received the award in the Hindi print category, Reshma Sanjeev Shivadekar of Loksatta won the award in the Regional Language category.

Vice-president M Venkaiah Naidu, who was the chief guest at the function, handed over the awards to 27 winners – in 25 categories, including print and broadcast – for outstanding work done in 2016 during the 12th edition of the Ramnath Goenka Excellence in Journalism Awards held recently in Delhi.

The winners were chosen by an eminent jury who scrutinised over 800 entries. The jury members included former Supreme Court Judge B.N. Srikrishna, HDFC Chairman Deepak Parekh, former Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi and senior journalist Pamela Philipose.

The awards, which come with a trophy and a reward of Rs 1 lakh to each of the winners, aim to celebrate excellence in journalism, recognise courage and commitment and showcase the outstanding contributions of journalists from across the country. Here is the full list of winners:

PRINT
Reporting From J&K And The Northeast: Abhishek Saha, *Hindustan Times*
Hindi: Rahul Kotiyal, Satyagrah.scroll.in
Regional Languages: Reshma Sanjeev Shivadekar, *Loksatta*
Environmental Reporting: Jimmy Philip, *Deepika Daily*
Uncovering India Invisible: S.V. Rajesh, *Malayala Manorama*
Business & Economic Journalism: Utkarsh Anand, *The Indian Express*
Political Reporting: Muzamil Jaleel, *The Indian Express*
Sports Journalism: Qaiser Mohammad Ali, *Outlook*
On The Spot Reporting: Shubhajit Roy, *The Indian Express*
Investigative Reporting: Ritu Sarin, P V Iyer, Jay Mazoomdar, *The Indian Express*
Feature Writing: Sangita Barooah Pisharoty, *The Wire*
Foreign Correspondent Covering India: Ellen Barry, *The New York Times*
Commentary And Interpretative Writing: Tamal Bandyopadhyay, *Mint*
Civic Journalism: Chaitanya Marpakwar, *Mumbai Mirror*
Photo Journalism: Waseem Andrabi, *Hindustan Times*

BROADCAST
Reporting From J&K And The Northeast: Moumita Sen, India Today
Hindi: Ravish Kumar, NDTV India
Regional Languages: Dinesh Akula, TV5 News
Environmental Reporting: No winner
Uncovering India Invisible: Manogya Loiwal, TV today
Business & Economic Journalism: Harshada Sawant, CNBC Awaaz
Political Reporting: Ashish Singh, News X
Sports Journalism: Bipasha Mukherjea, TV Today
On The Spot Reporting: Ashish Sinha, India News
Investigative Reporting: Sreenivasan Jain, NDTV 24x7 ■

Skills training gives confidence to women with disabilities

A government initiative to impart skills to the disabled has brought about a dramatic change in the thought processes of girls hailing from interior pockets of the country who have to face various bottlenecks to access income generating opportunities, hampered as they are with disabilities. **Aditi Panda** has more

In India, persons with disability have to endure a lot of hardship before they can find work, because they have less access than others to acquire job skills. Despite the fact that India has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability (UNCRPD), such people continue to face many difficulties in the labour market, and the women among them are doubly discriminated against at every step.

According to the 2011 census, there are 2.68 crore persons with disability in India, 1.18 crore of them women. The figures certainly indicate that people with disabilities account for a noteworthy proportion of the population of India. Yet, their need for employment remains mostly unmet, in spite of the Persons with Disability Act, 1995 being in force for almost a decade.

Hearing-impaired girls get hands-on with hair styling on manequins.

Ram Kishor Sharma, assistant director (Employment), National Career Service Centre for Differently Abled (NCSC for DA), based in Bhubaneswar, talked of the significance of skill training to empower the women with disability: "Before 2014, hardly 10 per cent got training under skill development whereas in neighbouring countries people are having better skills." The present government at the Centre started the Skill India Campaign with the basic objective of providing different skills to as yet untrained people, so that they could get into earning avenues.

"The NCSC for DA, earlier known as VRC, is working across the country and has 21 centres. Bhubaneswar is doing very well in terms of skills training because of the cooperation the state government is providing," Sharma said. The acquisition of skills goes a long way in empowering persons with disability, he stressed. It

A girl tries her hand at the keyboard.

develops their confidence, boosts their fluency of speech, brings them out of stereotypical thought processes, and most importantly, helps them turn their dreams into reality.

"We honestly feel that it is very essential to mainstream people with disabilities into the productive work force. We work with state governments, and organisations like the Dr Reddy Foundation. We have collaborations with big entities like the Orissa Mining Corporation, the Paradip Port Trust and NALCO, and they invest their CSR funds to help us provide tool kits to persons with disabilities who have completed their skills training," he said. Successful candidates are also given certificates. "We encourage self employment. This has reduced migration from rural areas and increased the socio-economic status of our trainees, specially women, who have become employers by giving work to others," Sharma added.

Lopamudra Parichha, who is learning the necessary skills to start her own beauty parlour, is upbeat. She has a speech impairment, but that doesn't hold her back. "I love dressing up and to dress up others, and so I decided to take up this course," she explained in sign language. "The course includes *mehndi* designs as well as bridal make-up, which will help me when I start my own parlour," she says with a big smile. She will get a tool kit when she competes the training. "I regularly browse the Internet to stay updated with the latest fashion trends, especially those followed by Bollywood actors," she confides.

Photos: AP

Lopamudra Parichha hard at work.

Ambarika Tejaswini Nayak plans to take up sewing.

There are many other women who are taking the same training as Lopamudra, getting the better of their physical challenges because they have an urge to become economically independent. Ambarika Tejaswini Nayak, confined to a wheelchair, hails from Koraput. She says: "Koraput has no facilities, so I could not complete school and get any job, but thanks to Skill India that imparts specialised training and also provides hostel facilities, I could take up this course." She says she will be provided a motorised sewing machine after the course, which will help her earn a decent income. "If my business does well, I will even be able to employ many others," she says, bursting with confidence.

"The Tally course will definitely help me get a placement as a data entry operator, and I can earn a minimum salary of Rs 5000 to Rs 7000, which is enough to meet my personal expenses," says Deepa Nayak, who has a visual impairment. "Not only will I not be dependent on my family, but can also help my younger sibling to study," she says.

It is indeed awesome to see the dramatic change in the thought processes of these girls who come from the most interior pockets of the country and have to face various bottlenecks to access income generating opportunities without any skills, hampered as they are with disabilities.

Sujata Behera, who teaches beauty parlour work and Sandhya Rani Das who teaches tailoring, were unanimous in the view that these women were fast learners and had the hunger to gain more knowledge. ■

(The writer, based in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, works freelance for the state government and several funding agencies of repute. Her area of expertise is documentation, training and reporting, and field of interest disability, gender, child rights, child protection and accessibility.)

Breaking out of shackles, bringing aspirations alive

For most people even a casual mention of the term *hijra* brings forth a rush of images, sounds, movements and attire. Likewise, a conversation concerning the community would invariably lead to comments, impressions and opinions that have been reinforced over time. How far removed is such a stereotypical image from the lives lived in India by thousands of *hijras* or 'transgender people' as they are called today? A show put up by them bowls over **Sujata Raghavan,** and she brings us up to speed with the reality

The India HIV/AIDS Alliance approaches transgender issues with sensitivity, candour and creates platforms that allow the community to articulate their concerns, of course, but also equally demonstrate their talent and capabilities. The organisation's annual signature event, Hijra Habba, now into its fifth consecutive year, aimed to do just that and sought to bridge the distance between the transgender community and society. Foot-stomping music, reverberating beats, lights and a full-throated cheer going up ever so often from the milling crowds. There was a buzz for sure at Select Citywalk, a swanky mall in south Delhi on a Friday evening in September.

Anyone walking in from any of the gates could sense a pull towards a plaza on the ground floor. This was the Hijra Habba in full swing – a signature event organised by the India HIV/AIDS Alliance, an NGO founded in 1999 that supports sustained responses to HIV in the country and protects the health and social rights of communities that are amongst the most vulnerable – transgenders or TGs. Conceptualised as a sequence of performances by various TG groups from across India, the event showcased the immense talent, raw energy and amazing grace of the dancers. More than that, it was a celebration of the TG community, their aspirations, their

Hijra Habba in full swing at Select Citiwalk in Delhi.

An enthusiastic audience watches TG groups perform.

Photos: SR

The Dancing Queens team celebrates after a riveting performance.

achievements and underlying all of this, their connecting with people, with society at large.

Loosely translated, the term *hijra habba* means transgender amalgamation. The scene on that day certainly was about 'amalgamation in action'. There was no sense of 'us' and 'them'. It was all of humanity, united by the sole purpose of swinging to the beats, of enjoying the dancing to the hilt. Not only were there crowds on the ground floor, but literally a sea of humanity watching from the circular balconies above.

Then the voice of the anchors rang out announcing the next group –"Dancing Queens from Mumbai!" And a roar went up. The 'Queens, around eight of them, picked a dance routine that was tough, combining folk and Bollywood styles. There were quick changes within the performance as they brought alive the traditions from three distinct states Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan. It was riveting, simply took your breath away.

For the TG community in India, things have not been easy. They have had to battle discrimination, deprivation at so many levels from the personal to the political. This is a continuing struggle. The Transgender Protection Bill addresses their legitimate aspirations – the right to marriage, adoption, insurance, health care, property and indeed life choices.

The community has developed a collective voice and identity to advocate for affirmative policy action. In this, India HIV/AIDS Alliance has played a role. In fact, the first half of Hijra Habba brought together close to 200 leaders from the TG/ *hijra* community across India, government officials, implementing partners, legal experts, and activists. The session saw intense deliberations on key concerns, current policy provisions as well strategies for advocacy and action plans.

In this larger scenario then, what is the role of a group like the Dancing Queens or DQs? Often it is the momentum on the ground, the changing perceptions that drive advocacy and ultimately lead to systemic change. DQs represent this change at the ground level – of expanding aspirations and horizons. Interestingly, the composition of the group itself speaks of amalgamation. As Narendra Belose, a senior dancer and choreographer, puts it, "Dancing Queens comprises Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender plus Heterosexual or LGBT plus H."

For generations, TG dancing groups in Maharashtra had been performing only local dance styles such as *laoni*. Platforms available to them were severely limited too – mainly the Ganesh Utsav *mandal*s and Natale Tumlha *manch*. Things would have continued in the same fashion but for the grit and spirit of Abhina Aher, Urmi Jhadav and Madhuri Sarode, the three founding members of Dancing Queens formed in 2009. All of them TGs, all of them dancers, they signalled a breaking out of shackles.

There was a daring certainly, a risk but also a sense of excitement, of heightened creativity. The group moved out of its niche to explore new forms, including the *mujra* and cabaret, Western style. As they pushed their boundaries, new avenues opened up. "In the past, we were invited to perform only at gay parties. Over the last two or three years things have changed," says a visibly thrilled Madhuri. "We were asked to perform at the Godrej Culture Lab and then at the Kashish Film Festival," she said, adding that each such event gave the group a push, a morale boost, a recognition of their talent and tireless efforts.

There were several challenges, too. There was a time when they did not have costumes or the money to buy or even rent them. Bipan Tanna, a friend who was a side-dancer in Bollywood, hit upon an ingenious idea. Once the shooting of dance routines for films was complete, costumes were discarded. Tanna persuaded his production teams to donate these to the DQs.

For the group members it has meant much more than a platform for dance. It has been a life journey together. "We are like a family," says Madhuri. "We love, fight, sulk and then make up – this is exactly what happens in families, isn't it?"

Perceptions are changing, too. For example, Bharat, a student of Fashion Communications hanging out at the mall with a friend, enjoyed the show thoroughly. It gave him something to ponder over. "They are human beings too, actually we are all the same," he said. ■

(The writer documents and reports issues of social development. Based in Delhi, her work takes her across India, often remote rural pockets, to gather ground-level stories and community perspectives.)

Documenting biodiversity on a digital platform

A citizen science initiative has been able to link amateur naturalists with experts on an online portal to report and record species of plants and animals. Since 2008, the India Biodiversity Portal has recorded more than 26000 species from 1.3 million observations. The quality and quantity of reporting has improved over the years, indicating a strengthening of biodiversity literacy, says **S. Gopikrishna Warrier**

There is an increasing interest in exploring natural habitats in India in the recent years. Encouraged by better connectivity and more conservation-related discussions in the public domain, many amateur enthusiasts are stepping into the countryside and forests. Observing and recording new plants and animals has become easier.

Since 2008, the India Biodiversity Portal (IBP) has been working to bring information from enthusiastic citizens to a common digital platform, so that it can be vetted by volunteering experts. Together, they have been able to create a buzz on India's biological diversity. The public discussion is gaining in traction with 1.3 million observations having been recorded on the portal. **R. Prabhakar,** the conservation scientist who made this possible, talks about how it all started and how the citizen science project evolved.

Photo: Sunny Joseph/IBP

The metallic jumper spider Siler semiglaucus was reported by an amateur from Chilavannur in Kerala and validated by an expert in Pune through the IBP.

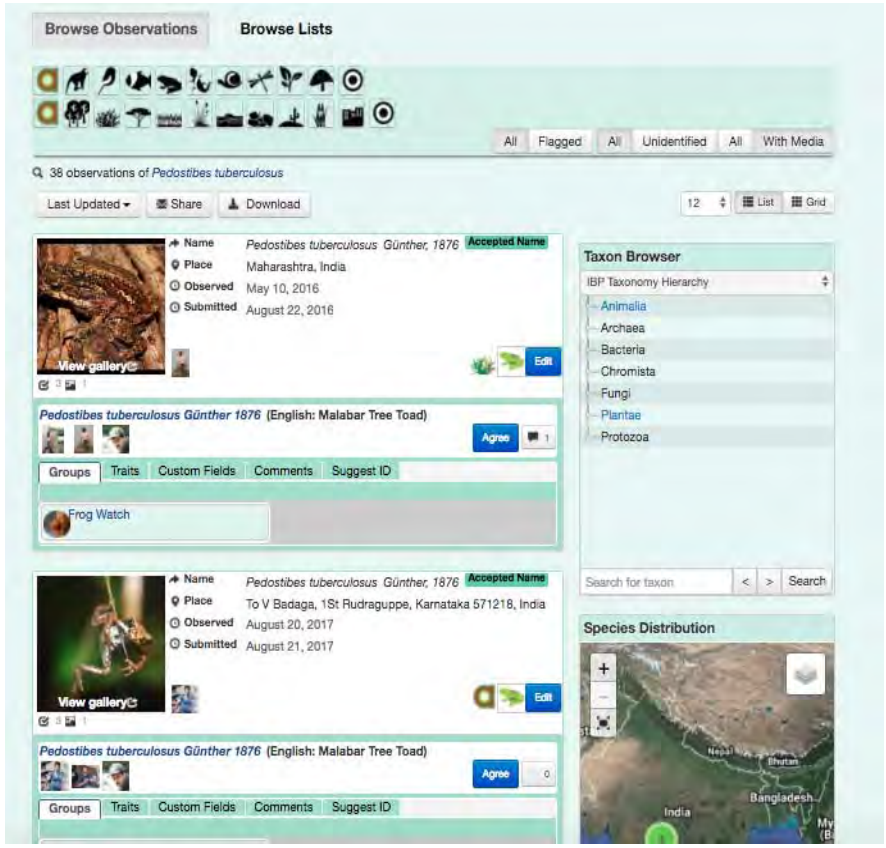
Photos: India.mongabay

R. Prabhakar, who coordinates IBP activities.

Why did you start the IBP? What was the need? Who were the partners involved in the initial stages?

The Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment laid the initial beginnings of this portal when it proposed to the national Knowledge Commission the idea of establishing an open access collaborative and participative biodiversity information system. This built into the initiative that the NKC had started in 2007 to establish

The home page of the IBP.



The distribution of the elusive Malabar tree toad Pedostibus tuberculosus was crowdsourced from 38 locations by contributors.

data portals involving citizens, and to be hosted by civil society groups. As a part of the initiative, the India Biodiversity Portal was proposed by ATREE along with other partner institutions.

The IBP initiative was proposed as a collaborative effort between five partner institutions – Agharkar Research institute, Pune; ATREE, Bengaluru; the Foundation for the Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions, Bengaluru; the National Chemicals Laboratory, Pune; and the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bengaluru. The idea was to develop a portal that would provide a platform for sharing information and also be an open-access source for biodiversity information. Other institutions have come together as partners on the portal by committing resources, sharing data and providing intellectual leadership for the evolution of an open and participatory portal. These are the Foundation for Ecological Security, Anand; the Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysore; the French Institute, Puducherry; and Strand Life Sciences, Bengaluru.

Who funded it then?

The 2011 funding was part of the Critical Ecosystems partnerships Fund (CEPF), which was trying to make investments in biodiversity hotspots for conservation. CEPF is a large fund, created to support civil society activities for conservation. In 2011, CEPF was funding studies for the Western Ghats. As part of this, they thought that it would be worthwhile to build an information system to host all the studies and reports. They earmarked some funding for establishing a Western Ghats biodiversity portal. This later developed into the India Biodiversity Portal (IBP).

Is this the only Indian biodiversity information system that has gone big?

What we do is only the tip of the iceberg of what can be done in India.

You should see some of the country-level portals, for example in Sweden. The kind of observations that the citizens put together is remarkable. They achieve in one day what we achieve in 15. It concerns the way in which societies behave, and the importance they give to data-based biodiversity science.

In India, there are people all over the country that are interested in nature. People are travelling through biodiversity-rich areas. If all of them contribute biodiversity data, it can be fascinating. Simultaneously, there must be a set of people who are willing to spend a certain amount of time helping to clean up and curate that data. This is where experts are needed to be involved – to clean up data and provide correct identification.

There is more that can be done in India. For instance, we have a huge diversity of moths in this country. Moths are very interesting. As caterpillars, they feed heavily on plants. But there are not many experts in this country to help us identify these moths. By using a platform such as the IBP, we can link field enthusiasts and experts and strengthen our understanding of moths. This is the potential of a platform like the IBP.

You were talking about the IBP as an example of citizen science. Can you please elaborate?

There have been some interesting examples of amateur citizen contributions that have been helpful to science. There is the case of an attractive looking spider being photographed and reported by a nature lover and photographer from Kerala. A researcher soon picked it up. The researcher and the amateur started interacting with each other on the portal. They collected the specimens and validated the identification and finally published the occurrence as a new distribution record for India for the metallic jumper spider *Siler semiglaucus*. The publication is available on the portal, and the species page has been updated on the IBP.

The Malabar tree toad *Pedostibus tuberculoses* is an arboreal species, and there is very little known of its distribution. It is only seen during the monsoon when it descends for mating. Frog researchers have been using the portal to try and crowdsource the distribution of this species. And there are currently 38 records on the portal and growing. There are other instances where the portal has been used by researchers, like mapping the distribution of invasive species across India. And there are many more possibilities.

Did the IBP improve citizen participation in biodiversity information gathering? Did it strengthen biodiversity understanding among the larger public?

All observation data on the portal is by citizen participation. There are some very serious and enthusiastic citizens who are carefully documenting biodiversity around their area and putting them up on the portal. The portal provided a platform for some of these people to contribute information. For example, there is this banana farmer outside Bengaluru who stumbled on the portal and since then has been actively contributing insect data on the portal. Initially, he had experts identify species, and now he has been actively identifying other moth observations on the portal. There is also a serious biodiversity documenter from Pune, who has been extensively curating and contributing fantastic observations from the rocky outcrops of the Western Ghats outside Pune.

Have you seen biases creeping in because of people's preference for certain kinds of animals – say birds or reptiles?

Of course, there are biases in citizen participation in biodiversity information. There are geographical as well as taxonomic biases. Globally, birds are the most observed and most contributed occurrence records in database systems. And if you look at global databases, you will find more contributions in accessible areas, along roads, etc. So any use of such data for scientific studies must recognize these biases.

How have you structured the IBP?

In a sense, we have developed the IBP as a flexible and modular system. We have different modules and groups (which are thematic, such as the Western Ghats). These are like micro-sites that are completely independent, which can decide whether they want to be a closed group or an open one. The groups can decide who can contribute content to that group and format it. All data rests at the mother portal, which is the India Biodiversity Portal. These groups or micro-sites are subsets or filtered views of this data.

Has the quality of information improved since you started the portal?

Quality has been reasonably good, and we are taking steps to strengthen this. Posting public documents can improve quality, and we are also developing mechanisms where we have quite a few experts verifying observations. Quantity is definitely increasing. For instance, there is much data from Assam, and we may load information from the people's biodiversity registers in Assam. Taking a cue from Assam, we are hoping that other Indian states may also use the platform to aggregate state specific biodiversity data. With each of these new collaborations, we build new features on to the platform, which is available to everybody else. ■

(The writer is senior contributing editor with Mongabay-India. This is a slightly shortened version of the interview that was first published at https://india.mongabay.com)

Unplanned growth a threat to sustainable development

Srinagar, one of the oldest cities in the world, has been rapidly growing in haphazard and unplanned manner. Unplanned urbanisation has degraded the overall quality of environment. Integrating land use planning with environment has become inevitable for sustainable development of the city. Srinagar's unabated development along the flood plain of River Jhelum poses a key challenge for city planners, says **Afsana Rashid**

Photos: AR/Charkha Features

River Jhelum, a day before the September 2014 floods hit Srinagar City.

The Draft Master Plan Srinagar Metropolitan Region – 2035 (Planning for Sustainable Growth and Change) prepared by Town Planning Organization Kashmir mentions that Srinagar has been growing very fast after 1947 mostly in a haphazard manner with insignificant contribution of the planned housing colonies. It says that the Master Plan 1971-91 triggered growth in the west and southwest direction of Srinagar mostly in the low lying areas, wetlands and flood absorption basins adjacent to Flood Spill Channel.

"The entire Srinagar city is in the flood plain of river Jhelum except for old city (Zaina Kadal etc) that is secure from floods", says Gurcharan Singh, well-known environmentalist. He says that the developed areas of the city such as Jawahar Nagar, Raj Bagh, Gogji Bagh, Wazir Bagh and Humhama had been in the flood plains of river Jhelum, about 40-60 years ago. He adds, "Srinagar is a historical city and has been suffering from floods, time and again. In fact, Jammu and Kashmir is a multi-hazard region that has a long history of facing disasters in the form of earthquakes, floods, landslides and avalanches that has paid heavily in terms of social, environmental and economic losses apart from a significant loss of human lives."

Singh goes on to say, "Horizontal growth of the city especially in posh areas including Hyderpora, Sanat Nagar, Bemina, Narbal, Zakura, etc emerge as a huge challenge for the sustainability of the city." He explained that though there was some misunderstanding and reservation among masses related to vertical growth in the city, they ought to be educated about pros and cons of city's vertical growth through print and electronic media. It would automatically take care of all the basic infrastructural needs of the city including roads and transport.

Community activity like schools, houses and hospitals could be well-planned and people ought to be made aware about earthquake resistant structures, reiterated the environmentalist.

"Mass level vertical growth of the city has to be promoted," argues Huneef Mohammad, technology design expert, adding there had to be clear alignment with building codes and design as per the seismicity of the region. "Vertical growth has to be in consonance with the building codes."

"Srinagar city that was 50-60 sq km about a century ago has now expanded to more than 1000 sq km on all the sides," Singh points out. "Kashmir Valley," he says, "is about 16000 sq km. out of

A view (exterior and interior) of a house damaged in the September 2014 floods in a posh locality in Srinagar.

which about 8000 sq km is under forests and about 8000 sq km is used for farming and other land use activities." The city, according to him, had many wetlands, now encroached. The area from the left side of Badshah Chowk to Dal Lake was a big wetland, about more than a century ago. Similarly, the area from Batmaloo to Narbal was also a wetland that has been converted into residential colony.

Singh says Srinagar was surrounded by forests only few years ago, which acted as lungs for the city and catered to its oxygen requirement and ensured its cleanliness. The historic Jama Masjid, he says, was surrounded by Deodar forests (known as Tashwan), but presently such forests can be seen only in remote parts of the Valley such as Tral in South Kashmir around 50 kilometres from Srinagar City and Lolab in border district Kupwara in North Kashmir. He said that *karewas* (plateau-like terraces) in South Kashmir's Pampore and Central Kashmir's Budgam provides a firm base for urbanisation that can save the city from floods and earthquakes.

The wetlands especially in the south, southwest, west and northwest have been acting as flood sponges protecting the city in times of floods. These have been urbanised in the aftermath of the Master Plan 1971-91 making city more vulnerable to natural disasters. Historically, wetlands and lakes were not only the reserves of biodiversity but also acted as flood sponges.

Srinagar, according to the Draft Master Plan, has evolved along the banks of River Jhelum and has subsequently developed around the peripheries of some water bodies such as Dal Lake, Nigeen Lake, Khusalsar, Brari Numbal etc. Consequently, the city has increased in size and scale to such an extent that the domestic waste finds its way in nearby water bodies.

According to the Draft Master Plan, Srinagar City lacks modern sewerage facilities. Septic tanks are prevalent and those without such facility discharge their wastewater into open drains. Most houses in the old city have service privies connecting surface drains which finally drain into water bodies.

Abdhesh Gangwar, regional director, CEE Himalaya, attributes floods in Srinagar to improper drainage system and unplanned urban development. The technology design expert, however, emphasises that flood prevention roadmap should include both short-term and long-term measures, which will stipulate several diversions of River

Public transport in the city.

An aerial view of Srinagar near the busy street of Jehangir Chowk.

Jhelum at multiple points along its trajectory and construction of multiple dams. The dams, he says, will additionally act as a reservoir for generating electricity during winters.

The Draft Report further states that Srinagar City was built using wood as the main source of local construction material best suited to climatic conditions of the region. Over a period of time, the wooden material used for the construction of residential and religious structures had dried up and the vulnerability to catch fire had increased, especially in the core city areas where houses were huddled together, providing limited access for firefighting during such calamities.

Awareness has to be built up about fire hazards and smart infrastructure must be developed along all the critical buildings such as hospitals that would be centrally monitored, says Mohammad, adding that such guidelines should be included in building codes as well. "In fact a roadmap should be framed to adhere to earthquake resistant structures within a time bound manner even if it involves subsidies. It should be periodically reviewed and published."

The city falls in a seismic gap zone, where due to centuries of tectonic plate movement stresses have been building up that have not been released by any major earthquakes or a large number of smaller earthquakes in reliably recorded history, highlights the Draft Report. Srinagar City falls in Seismic Zones IV and V, reiterates Gangwar, adding that more than earthquakes, the unsafe buildings are dangerous.

Says Mohammad, "While winter infrastructure here has to be built up as in the European countries, mass level identification and construction of habitable colonies on the outskirts of the Srinagar City ought to be developed with major upgradation of transport, road connectivity, introduction of several metro wings within the Srinagar city. Major revamp is required vis-à-vis health and sanitation. Strong auditing framework is to be created which would ensure adequate dimensioning of healthcare and sanitation needs for all citizens." He also called for plantation drive to be carried out at mass level and framing and enforcing of strong legislative measures against deforestation.

Despite its huge hydel potentials, Jammu and Kashmir is a power starved state. Gangwar, too, points that despite huge potential of water resources in the state there is no proper supply of electricity. As against its huge potential pegged at 25000 MW, the installed capacity of about 1500 MW is just six per cent of its potential capacity, according to the Draft Master Plan. The expected power demand of the Valley is going to be 2500 MW by 2035 while that of the Srinagar Metropolitan Region 1164 MW, the Draft Report adds. To meet the power supply pressure, the Report focused on development of mini-hydel power projects and exploring alternative sources of energy. The government, it says, should focus on the smart grid system which uses analogue or digital information and communications technology to gather and act on information in an automated fashion to improve the efficiency, reliability, economics and sustainability of the production and distribution of electricity.

Keeping in view the eco-fragility and flood and seismic vulnerability of the region, appropriate urban planning has to be devised and implemented. The government has to come up with unequivocal policy for preservation of city-ecosystem to increase its resilience to several disasters. Despite repeated attempts joint commissioner (Planning), Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC), Ghulam Hassan Mir, could not be contacted. ■

(Courtesy: Charkha Features)

VIEW FROM THE NORTHEAST

A press club initiative spreads health awareness

The vast majority of media persons in India's Northeast do not have medical insurance coverage and earn very little. They find it hard to afford healthcare expenses for themselves and their loved ones. The Guwahati Press Club has been conducting 'evening clinics' to address the issue. **Nava Thakuria** has the story

Basundhara (not her real name) often comes to the Guwahati Press Club to meet friends and kill time. She works on the news desk of an Assamese newspaper. On one of her visits, the weekly out-patient department (OPD) clinic was in progress, and I suggested that she get her thyroid level and other parameters checked. Though she was reluctant, she finally agreed to let the health workers collect a blood sample from her. The next day, Basundhara collected her results and, to her horror, found she had a high thyroid level. Fortunately, it was not a major problem, and could be corrected with timely medical intervention. The OPD clinic is being conducted regularly at the Press Club since August 2016. Basundhara is not the only one it has helped.

Sailesh (name changed) comes to the Press Club only when there is a meeting scheduled. Far from young and a confirmed bachelor, he has always been confident that his large extended family will take care of him, should the need arise. During one of his visits, an OPD clinic was being held, and he casually went in to have his blood pressure checked. The nurse's eyes widened at the reading. When the attending doctor checked Sailesh's pressure, it remained at a high 180 by 110 mmHg. The doctor asked if Sailesh had his blood pressure taken earlier. He replied in the negative, saying that it was an unnecessary exercise as he had always enjoyed good health. He refused to accept the reading at the clinic.

Though the doctor and I both tried to convince Sailesh that he had a condition which should not be ignored, he refused medication. It was almost a week before I saw him again. This time, he had a bandage around his head. To my questions, he replied that he had had a fall at his home, and had to be rushed to hospital, where doctors had again detected high blood pressure and diagnosed him as hypertensive. Sailesh was lucky to have escaped without any major injury and admitted that he had been wrong to ignore the advice of the doctor at the Press Club clinic. He had begun taking medication to control his blood pressure.

The 40-year-old Guwahati Press Club started the initiative titled 'Evening with a doctor' in August 2016 with the aim of spreading health awareness among its members and their families. Since then, over 75 health clinics have been organised at the Press Club premises, benefiting hundreds of media families. Under the programme, a practicing physician comes to the Press Club every Saturday evening and offers free consultations. Often, screenings of weight, hypertension, blood sugar, bone density, pulmonary function, thyroid levels, etc are organised and follow-up consultations arranged.

Started with support from Dr Jayanta Bardoloi, managing director of Assam's well-known Dispur Hospital, to set up a doctor's chamber at the Club premises, the health camps have helped detect blood pressure, sugar and thyroid disorders among journalists and their families, and doctors have advised them on how to handle such conditions.

Most Guwahati-based hospitals have supported the initiative, sending their doctors by turn to attend the media clinics. Even specialists from various distinguished healthcare institutions in other parts of the country, like Apollo Hospitals (Chennai), SIMS Hospital (Chennai), Manipal Hospital (Bangalore), Fortis Hospital (Bangalore), Medanta the Medicity Hospital (Gurgaon), etc. have attended the camps. They were encouraged by the post-event media coverage.

It is worth noting that around 90 per cent of media persons in the Northeast Region of India do not have medical insurance coverage. Most journalists working with regional newspapers and news channels earn very little as salary, and other benefits they are entitled to are nominal, at best. Hence, they find it hard to afford healthcare expenditure and, often, when they are faced with medical emergencies either for themselves or their loved ones, they end up depending on financial support from the government and donations from well-wishers.

The Press Club has more than 300 regular members, mostly professional journalists working for regional, national and international media outlets. Though the camps are meant for enrolled members

Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

and their families, any journalist of the region (also the country) and their dependants are welcome to make use of the clinics. Other media organisations, including press clubs in the region, are being encouraged to take similar initiatives to enhance the health of their members and also boost healthcare-related journalism in this part of the country.

Finally, meet John (a rural journalist from Jayantia hills of Meghalaya), who recently came to the Press Club when an OPD clinic was about to start. I asked him to join in. Initially, he declined, but later agreed to get himself tested. A random test revealed that his sugar level was almost 400 mg/dL. The doctor spent a long time giving him medical advice. John, when he came out of the clinic, had only this to say to me: "*Dost* (dear friend), you have made me a sick person today. God bless you."■

(The writer is an Assam-based journalist and secretary, Guwahati Press Club.)

Nalin Mehta is executive editor, TOI Online

The Times of India (TOI) has promoted its consulting editor, Nalin Mehta, and assigned him the new role of executive editor, TOI Online. Mehta has previously been managing editor, India Today (English TV news channel) and is also an award-winning social scientist and author. He has authored four book, three edited books and over 20 refereed academic journal articles and book chapters. He is co-director, Times Literary Festival; senior fellow, India Development Foundation (IDF), an editor, South Asian History and Culture (Routledge) book series and journal. ■

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)

No lessons learnt yet in quake-prone Northeast

It is often said that earthquakes don't kill people; it is the buildings that do. If building codes are not enforced in seismically active zones, even moderate intensity quakes can cause widespread damage to buildings and injure people. This is what is happening in the Northeast, a new study has pointed out, says **Dinesh C. Sharma**

Manipur was hit with an earthquake of intensity 6.7 on January 4, 2016, which caused devastation in state capital, Imphal, and adjoining areas. It provided an opportunity to scientists to understand risks posed to buildings and the state of construction practices in the region. While many buildings collapsed, it was noted that the damage caused to public building was disproportionate to the observed intensity of shaking.

Scientists from three Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) – Kanpur, Guwahati and Patna – undertook a reconnaissance survey of earthquake-affected regions immediately after the quake, and revisited the area after three months to see the condition of the damaged structures and restoration work. Results of the study have now been published in the journal, *Current Science*.

It was found that while several reinforced concrete (RC) buildings in Imphal suffered varying degree of damage, traditional wooden houses made using bamboo and wood, known as *shing-khim*, reported no damage. Government buildings, covered in the study, were damaged heavily because they did not conform to seismic code of practices, and there was general lack of enforcement of existing regulations and codes. In addition, factors such as inferior quality of raw materials and shoddy workmanship contributed to collapse of buildings.

"The seismic risk in the region is growing at an alarming pace with increasing inventory of vulnerable construction," the study has concluded. The 2016 quake, it said, "should be regarded as a preview of what is likely to happen in the event of a greater shaking expected for the region and should hasten the community to take necessary steps."

Durgesh C. Rai, a professor of civil engineering at IIT Kanpur, who led the study, told *India Science Wire* that "despite considerable awareness in public about earthquakes and associated risks, both public and administrators, chose to ignore the threat and continued to build structures which were not earthquake-resistant."

Due to such negligence, he said, "many publicly-funded buildings suffered severe damage under shaking intensity of VI–VII which is not only ironic but also represents

Collapse of a three-storey building in Keishampar (a). Collapse of 4-storey building in Dewlabland, Imphal (b).

Photos: India Science Wire

Good performance shown in traditional construction—a two-storey wooden house (known as shing-khim*) at Dewlabland in Imphal (left) and a single storey shing-khim at Noney Bazar near Epicentral.*

the utter betrayal of the public trust."

Buildings at the Inter State Bus Terminal (ISBT), Government Polytechnic and Central Agriculture University (CAU), all government-funded and supervised constructions, were expected to perform satisfactorily during earthquakes, but they all experienced moderate to severe damages. Large building campuses such as CAU were constructed on landfill soil and they performed extremely poorly during the earthquake shaking, the study pointed out.

The newly constructed concrete buildings of world famous Ima Keithel or Mothers' Market, too, suffered damage. The market earlier operated from bamboo structures which were functional but were in poor condition due to lack of maintenance. So, the government dismantled the market and built three concrete structures in 2010. All three buildings have similar elevation and plan but only one of them showed better performance during the earthquake.

"The traditional constructions using lighter timber and bamboo have performed well and no damage to such structures in Imphal was reported," Dr Rai added. "Despite available knowledge, seismic safety remains neglected and the society is not adequately prepared due to lack of implementation." He said the lessons from the Manipur quake were applicable for the entire northeast region. ■

(Courtesy: India Science Wire. The research team included Durgesh C. Rai, Hemant B. Kaushik and Vaibhav Singhal.)

Ira Joshi is director-general, Doordarshan News

Press Information Bureau director-general Ira Joshi was on Nov 20 appointed as the director-general of Doordarshan News following the retirement of Veena Jain, according to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Press Information Bureau DG Ghanshyam Goel has been made the new DG of Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP), replacing Esther Kar, who was put on "compulsory wait", a ministry order said. Doordarshan News is currently producing news content in Hindi, English, Urdu and Sanskrit languages. ■

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)

There's so much that Gandhians around the world teach us

Twice a year, on October 2 and January 30, the nation pays tributes to the Father of the Nation. The rest of the time, it is "on with the global race, along the path of profligrate, non-sustainable use of resources, in the pursuit of profits", disregarding the ill effects of such inappropriate 'development' paths in a country like India says **Sakuntala Narasimhan**

Mahatma Gandhi's life and philosophy had a profound influence on two world renowned leaders – South Africa's Nelson Mandela who led the anti-apartheid movement before becoming the country's president, and Martin Luther King Jr of the US who likewise led a massive movement of blacks for equal rights. Both lived in the 20th Century, and both adopted Gandhian ideologies of non-violence inspired by the Mahatma's movement for freedom in India. As yet another January 30th has passed by, I am thinking of four others who espoused the same Gandhian ideals and made significant contributions to the furtherance of the idea of social equity as the only meaningful test of true progress.

One of the four was a refugee who fled from Nazi Germany to Britain. Another was an American journalist who became famous as an author and stood for public office. The third Gandhian whom I met some years ago in Europe, is from Chile; and the fourth, an Indian to the core, was an extraordinary visionary but a self-effacing son of Andhra whose birth centenary was celebrated two years ago; he set benchmarks for the application of Gandhian concepts in academics that predate Nobel laureate Amartya Sen's pioneering "capacity building" theory of human development.

All four emphasised the need for ethics and "people-centric" policies if development is to be meaningful. Like Gandhi, all four bemoaned the obsession with 'big' -- big industries, mega dams, big projects, massive outlays, without addressing the effects of such 'mega' projects on the people, especially the poor. If development is for the people (who else?), nothing can justify massive spending that does not benefit disadvantaged sections, and instead widens inequalities, all four said – isn't that exactly what Gandhi said, when he suggested, " Whenever you are in doubt, recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man you have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him… will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? Then you will find your doubts melting away…"

Gandhi was not just about *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*; his wider philosophy encompassed insights into meaningful development, now popular, six decades later, as the global Real World Economics movement in the wake of the 2008 financial meltdown that paupered millions, while the banks that caused the devastation got billions of dollars as bail-outs. Without social equity, mere GDP growth becomes a travesty of progress. Especially if a nation professes democracy. No government decision that is not 'people-centric' can be validated on grounds of monetary profits. This is what Gandhi said, and all four Gandhians on my list reiterated with great passion and conviction.

The German refugee who settled in Britain was E.F. Schumacher, author of *Small is Beautiful*, who died 40 years ago. *Small is Beautiful* is an indictment of the global obsession with 'big' and 'bigger', and indiscriminate adoption of capital intensive models by the developing nations simply because these models worked in the West, forgetting that big may not always be better -- "To be a good shoe maker," he said, " it is not enough to know a lot about making shoes, it is also necessary to know about feet; the shoe made for the big fellow doesn't fit the little fellow, small feet need different shoes, not an inferior one but of the right size." Quite. One size fits all, *nah?*

In 1962, the Indian Government invited him to tour the country and submit a plan for development. He suggested the adoption of "intermediate technology" which would make use of abundant labour that is available (unlike in the West) while capital is scarce. The government dismissed his suggestion, and he left India in a huff. (The same government, he remarked, organised a conference on 'appropriate technology' 15 months later) He was also called a crank (just as Gandhi was ridiculed as a "half naked fakir") for warning against blindly embracing capital intensive projects – and he retorted: "Good, a crank is a useful gadget that causes revolutions."

Rapacity, Schumacher said, is "inherent in modern capital intensive models, while "ads stimulate greed" – recall Gandhi's comment that there is "enough for everybody's needs but not for everybody's greed". Both spoke

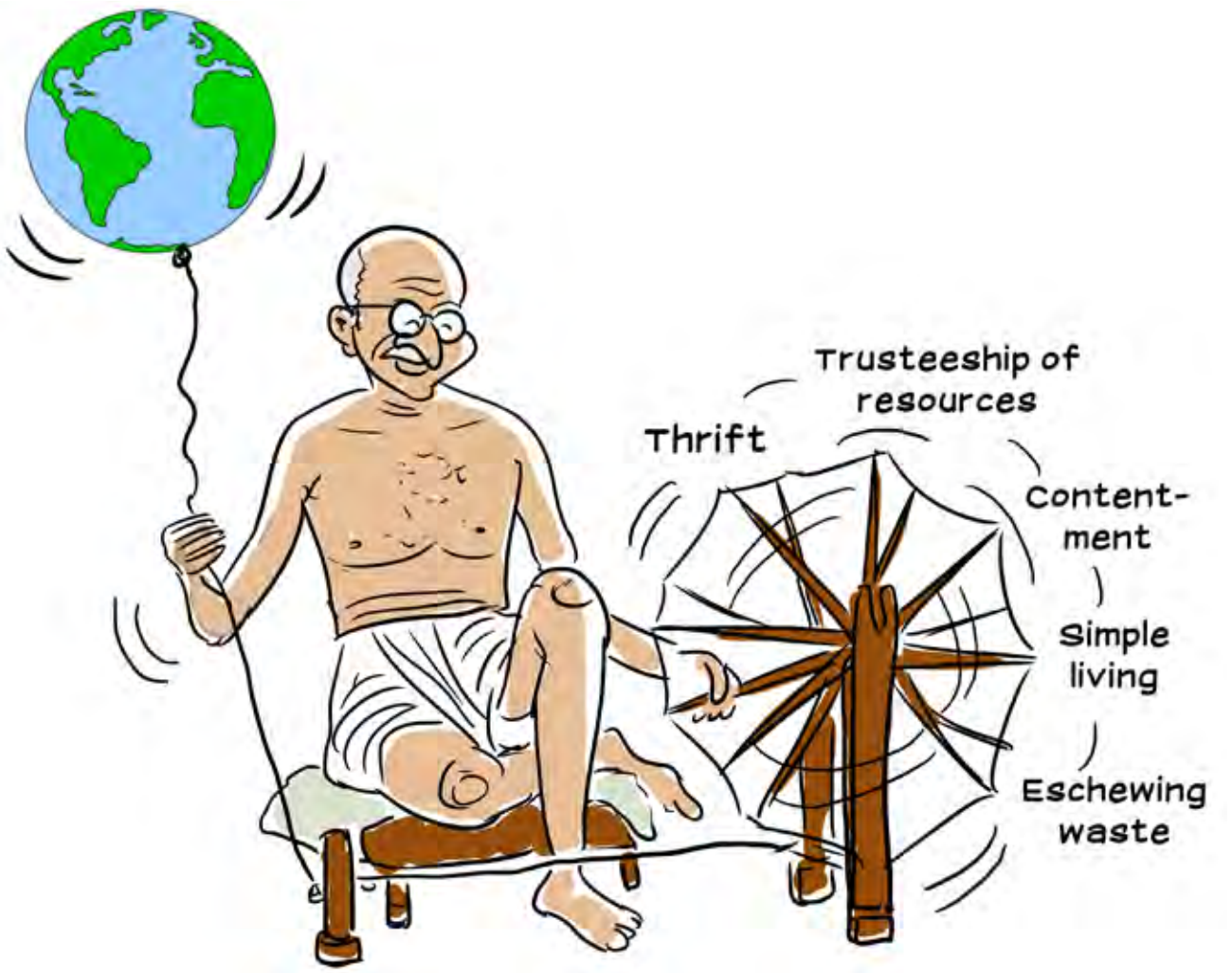


Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

of the dehumanising effects of modern industrial processes that treat labour as merely a factor of production (Schumacher called it "soul destroying"). Work is not merely something a human being has to do for survival; it brings fulfillment and stimulates creative energy (which machines throttle).

"God forbid that India should ever take to industrialisation after the manner of the West, under the spell of giant machines… this would strip the world bare like locusts," said Gandhi, writing in *Young India* (1931.) Juxtapose this with what Schumacher said: "Man becomes not the master of the machines he handles but its slave; pressing a button or pulling a lever for eight hours a day robs him of his humanity and his soul – that is not progress". Gandhi's spinning was not just the creation of rough thread; it stood for a philosophy, a statement and stance that acquired far greater value and importance than the value of the spun thread.

No one called Henry George the 'American Gandhi' because he lived much before Gandhi became known and died 120 years ago. In his book written in 1879 focusing on socio-economic inequalities, he emphasised the need for economic development based on "moral principles" (the Real World Economics movement of today denounces neo-liberal policies as amoral). George too denounced the market driven, profit-centred model of development that has become the global norm.

Long before modern analysts came up with discussions about the anomaly of rising GDP alongside widening gaps between the haves and have-nots, Schumacher, Henry George (and Gandhi) tried to offer more viable, ethical and socially egalitarian alternatives (promote local initiatives, empower at the local level for true democratic equity). George wrote about "trusteeship" of common resources; Gandhi too urged us to treat common resources as held in trusteeship (whereas under the fashionable 'public-private partnership' that we are advocating, even water

supply is being privatised, and common lands and tribal forests are being appropriated for 'industrial development').

In the Machkund Dam area in Andhra Pradesh, the tribal women who used to access the river water before the dam was built, now have to walk much farther, taking long detours, to reach the river because their path is now blocked for security reasons. Then there are the Narmada Dam oustees, rendered homeless because a dam has come up in the name of 'development'. Why is it okay to dispossess some to feed others? Under what norms of ethics?

Henry George's book *Progress and Poverty* sold more copies than any other book before his time, and when he passed away his funeral was reported "the biggest since Abraham Lincoln's".

Chilean academic Professor Manfred Max Neef, whom I have had the pleasure of interacting with, says the same in his book on *Experiences in Barefoot Economic*, based on his personal experience in poor countries. Winner of the Right Living International award (1982) and founder of the Centre for Development Alternatives, he declared himself an "admirer of Gandhi". As an economist, he had plenty to say, just like Schumacher, about today's obsession with capital intensive developmental models.

We look at profits, Neef observes, but do not factor in the social costs (rootlessness suffered by immigrant labourers moving to the metropolis, erosion of the sense of community, loss of identity as a dehumanised 'cog in a machine'). Capital intensive development has increased poverty -- worldwide, incremental incomes have gone steadily to the upper one percent, the bottom 99 per cent have not benefited; in Bengaluru, the number of billionaires has risen to 13130 today, while simultaneously the number of slums has risen from 480 five years ago, to 520 today. Some 'development'! Writing in *The Harijan*, in 1940, Gandhi urged the

Prof Manfred Max Neef.

"abolition of hideous inequalities resulting in the existence of millions of have-nots and a handful of haves". So what kind of tribute is the nation going to offer, to the Mahatma, 77 years after he made that comment?

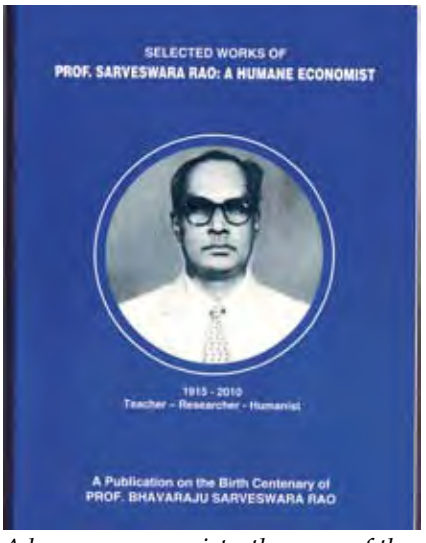
But how do we works for the adoption of a different, more ethical model? "Civil society has to rise to the challenge, by mobilising," says Prof Neef. If Gandhi could mobilise an entire nation to rise against colonial rule, isn't it possible to mobilise the populace against plans, priorities and allocations that cause violence of another kind (social, communal, emotional, psychological)?

Did not thousands of faceless, unknown citizens toss their jewelry and imported cloth and precious savings, in support of the freedom movement, without calculating any personal returns or rewards ? Have we perhaps lost that capacity for 'social involvement' and mobilisation today, because humans are now assessed not in terms of ethical involvement but in terms of money, power and position?

Professor Bhavaraju Sarveswara Rao spent a lifetime as an economist at Andhra University in Visakhapatnam, consciously refusing high profile and lucrative international assignments, but was greatly admired by leading economists like Prof V.K.R.V. Rao (who served on the Planning Commission and as Union minister), Prof P.R. Brahmananda, former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, and RBI Governor C. Rangarajan who respected him for his extraordinary devotion to right living and Gandhian ethics.

Long before Amartya Sen came up with his theory on capacity building as a vital ingredient for meaningful development, Professor Rao espoused the same theory, emphasising human development, social equity and "relevance of academic research to real life problems" (which he called "action research"; as part of the observance of his centenary celebrations an endowment has now been created to promote inter-disciplinary research on socio-economic areas pertaining to ground realities for the poor and disadvantaged, as against armchair theorising based on sophisticated models).

The latest validation of Gandhian economics comes from Washington DC no less, where the World Watch Institute, in its State of the World report urges "more voice for the people, local governance, and more equitable distribution of economic


SELECTED WORKS OF
PROF. SARVESWARA RAO: A HUMANE ECONOMIST
1915 - 2010
Teacher – Researcher - Humanist
A Publication on the Birth Centenary of
PROF. BHAVARAJU SARVESWARA RAO

A humane economist - the cover of the book published on Prof Rao's birth centenary.

Photos: SN

Prof Sarveswara Rao (right) with former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao.

returns because a more equitable world is a more secure world" (and security is a global concern today, spawned by disgruntlement, frustration, envy and anger at injustice). These democratic requirements, the report stresses, are "non-negotiable components" of sustainable development.

So we come back, circuitously, via Washington DC, to the fashionable engagement with issues of 'sustainable development' and 'nurturing planet earth', via Gandhian ideas – of thrift, trusteeship of resources, contentment rather than greed for more, simple living, and eschewing waste that the report calls "sinful". Combining ethics and morals with economic assessments, in other words. ■

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An editor who brought fairness, moderation, sobriety into play

In 1838, a son was born in Calcutta to Ishwar Chandra Pal, a man of modest means whose mastery over the English language would invite praise even from colonial masters. The boy by the name of Kristo Das Pal was to turn an ace journalist, editor, orator and bureaucrat. Twenty two years time was enough for Kristo Das to prove his mettle in the fields of mass media, mass communication, legislation and public service. **Mrinal Chatterjee** on the man and his times

After receiving an English education at the Oriental Seminary and the Hindu Metropolitan College from Calcutta, Kristo Das Pal devoted himself to journalism from an early age. A student of D.L. Richardson, he acquired an admirable proficiency in English. In 1857, Kristo Das started the *Calcutta Monthly Magazine* jointly with few friends, but it survived only for about six months. He then contributed regularly to the newspapers such as *Morning Chronicle*, the *Citizen*, *Phonix*, and *Harkaru*, and occasionally to the *Englishman*.

When the *Central Star* was started at Cawnpore (now Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh), Kristo Das became its Calcutta correspondent. He was next enrolled as staff of the *Hindu Intelligencer*. He also wrote a series of articles to the newspaper *Hindoo Patriot* on the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, which made its editor Hurish Chunder Mukerji think that Kristo Das Pal "would be able to do much for his country, if God spared him".

Kristo Das wrote several pamphlets on such subjects as 'Young Bengal vindicated', 'The mutinies and the people', and 'Indigo cultivation'. The first paper was read at an anniversary meeting in commemoration of David Hare, and it was printed and published for Hurro Chunder Ghose, a judge of the Calcutta Small Cause Court, to whom it was dedicated. The essay attracted much attention, and was severely criticised by Meredith Townsend, in *Friend of India*, in an article titled, VanitasVanitatum. The Calcutta public was surprised, when it was subsequently announced in the *Calcutta Literacy Gazette* that the author of the essay was only a schoolboy.

The fame made Kristo Das's aspiration to work for the *Hindoo Patriot* a reality. In 1860, he was appointed assistant secretary (and afterwards secretary) to the British Indian Association. The weekly magazine was transferred by a trust deed to some members of the British Indian Association. Hurish Chunder Mukerji, editor of *Hindoo Patriot* died the following year; the paper and the chief editorship was handed over to Kristo Das. Under his editorship, the newspaper grew in stature.

As a journalist, Kristo Dascame more than once into conflict with the authorities. In 1866, Sir Cecil Beadon, then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, replied publicly to certain remarks made in the *Hindoo Patriot* about famine and, in 1874, Sir George Campbell recorded in a minute that the *Hindoo Patriot* was a paper which cherished 'ill-will towards government', to which, of course, Kristo Das sent a suitable reply. Critics say in later years, the paper was looked upon with great favour by the authorities and they referred to it always to ascertain native opinion. He edited the paper with conspicuous ability for twenty-three years. Not one to practise lopsided journalism, his flair for accuracy and balance in news reporting won him praise from the Europeans as well.

Provided by: MC

Kristo Das Pal.

Law member of the Viceroy's Council Sir C.P. Ilbert remarked, "Succeeding, at the age of some of the graduates of today, to the management of some of the oldest organs of public opinion in this country by the readiness and versatility of his pen, by the patient industry which he displayed in mastering the details of the subjects with which he undertook to deal, by the fairness, breadth, and moderation of his utterances, he gradually and steadily advanced its (Hindoo Patriot) reputation during his twenty-three years of editorship, and raised it from a nearly moribund condition to the

first place among native Indian journals."

In 1879, Kristo Das was made secretary of the Board of Bengal Landlords – the British Indian Association. As editor of a widely read native newspaper of the day and as secretary to the most important political association in Bengal, Kristo Das rose rapidly in public office. He was appointed a municipal commissioner and Justice of the Peace in 1863. In 1872, he was nominated a member of the Legislative Council of Bengal. The following year, he was made a Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire, a rare distinction for an Indian during colonial rule. In 1883, he was elected by the British Indian Association as its representative in the Imperial Legislative Council, with the approval of the Viceroy. He was also a Fellow of the Calcutta University.

In all these different capacities, Kristo Das laboured hard to earn distinction. "However keenly he may have felt, however vigorously or eloquently he may have defended his own position in any matter, he could speak and write on the most burning questions, with an amount of good temper, and fairness, and moderation which was an example to all public men," said Sir Richard Garth, late Chief Justice of the High Court of Calcutta.

Despite rising to the top most echelons in journalism and politics, Kristio Das remained humble. After being conferred the title of Rai Bahadur at the Imperial Assemblage, on the January 1, 1887, he made light of the honourary title and remarked, "May we ask what dire offence did we commit for which this punishment was reserved for us? We have no ambition for titular distinctions. If we had a voice in the matter, we would have craved the permission of our kind and generous rulers to leave us alone!"

Domestic happiness, however, eluded Rai Kristo Pal Das Bahadur. He was married in 1856 and had two children. In 1874, he married again after being widowed for two years. None of his three children from both weddings survived. He died on the July 24, 1884, reportedly of diabetes, leaving behind no bloodline but his legacy which is etched in India's history.

Viceroy of India Lord Ripon condoled his death thus: "By this melancholy event, we have lost from among us a colleague of distinguished ability. Kristo Das Pal owed the honourable position to which he had attained to his own exertions. His intellectual attainments were of a high order, his rhetorical gifts were acknowledged by all who heard him, and were enhanced when addressing this council by his thorough mastery over the English language."

A full length statue of him was unveiled by Lord Elgin at Calcutta in 1894. The emphasis on presenting moderate views as an editor and sobriety of Kristo Das Pal's criticisms is a lesson for the present lot of editors and journalists. ■

(The author, a journalist-turned-media academician, presently heads the Eastern India campus of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication in Dhenkanal, Odisha. This is the fourth in a series of profiles of great Indian newspaper editors who have, through the course of their work and career, made a signal contribution to India's Freedom Movement, to the development of society and to the development of Journalism.)

National Awards for Excellence in Journalism announced

The Press Council of India has announced the winners of National Awards for Excellence in Journalism 2017. Sam Rajappa and Sarat Mishra, eminent journalists, were jointly designated awardee in the category Raja Ram Mohan Roy Award for their outstanding contributions towards Journalism.

Shalini Nair, senior assistant editor, national bureau, Indian Express, Delhi, was chosen for the award of Rural Journalism & Developmental Reporting.

K. Sujith, senior reporter, Mangalam Daily, Kannur and Chitrangada Choudhury, freelancer, Odisha, were jointly selected in the category of Investigative Journalism.

C.K. Thanseer, news photographer, Chandrika Daily, Calicut, Kerala, and Vijay Verma, principal photo journalist, Press Trust of India, New Delhi, were jointly selected in the category of Photo Journalism - Single News Picture.

J. Suresh, chief photographer, Malayala Manorama, was selected in the category of Photo Journalism – Photo Feature.

Gireesh Kumar M.P., Times of India, Kochi, Kerala, was selected for the award in the category of Best Newspapers Art: Covering Cartoons, Caricatures and Illustrations. ■

Celebrating press freedom

Today's news is tomorrow's history was an adage coined at a time when the print media was striving to record all noteworthy incidents that took place anywhere in the world. It continues this effort even today. The Newseum, an initiative of the Forum Foundation in USA, offers a 'window to the world' of news coverage, says **M.R. Dua**

The print media has acquired a venerable status in India's vibrant and lively democracy. The proof of this is that a plethora of newspapers and magazines publish news stories and articles about national and international developments, often surmounting many handicaps to make this happen.

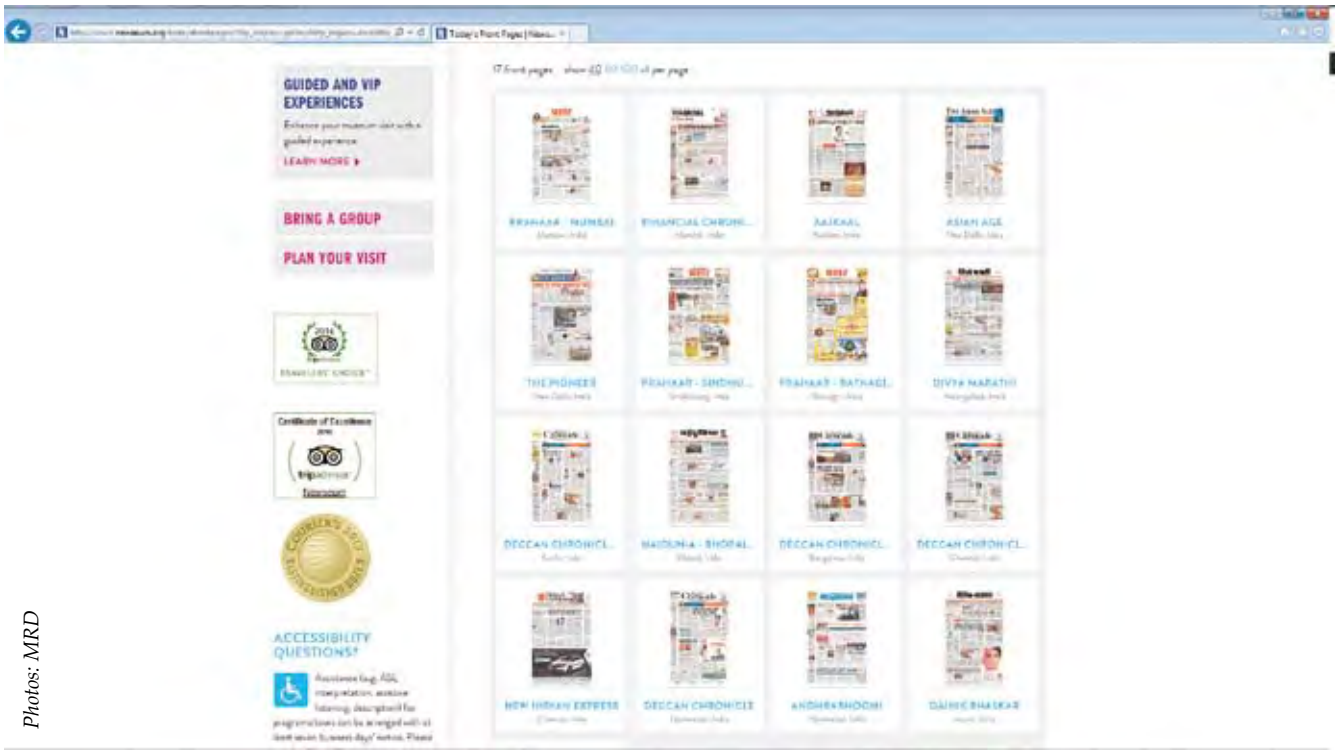
Newspapers and magazines brought out in India by intellectuals, political observers and social activists such as Ramananda Chatterjee (*Modern Review*), Gandhiji (*Young India* in English and *Harijan* in Hindi and Gujarati) and Lala Lajpat Rai (*VandeMatram* in Urdu) once published news about the Freedom Movement. These publications are referred to even today for tracing many significant and landmark developments during the Independence Struggle. Kolkata's National Public Library preserves and maintains files of some selected newspapers and a few periodicals.

But far away in the US, a beginning was made by a non-profit, non-partisan foundation, the Freedom Forum, for this very purpose. It set up the Newseum, considered to be a landmark in the American media scenario. It started life in 1997 in a small building in Arlington, Virginia, close to Washington DC. During its nearly ten-year service to the media, the Newseum had created an excellent impression and earned laurels in foreign media circles too.

Since the Newseum is treated as the symbol of press freedom – an integral part of USA's ideals of liberty and equality enshrined in the First Amendment of the country's Constitution – a new and larger building was envisaged to be built to house the institution on Pennsylvania Avenue, in Washington DC. The total cost was estimated to be around $450 million. Several media organisations, such as The New York Times and Time Warner, and several TV networks and family foundations like those set up by the Bancrofts and Pulliams generously contributed to the cost of the new building.

The current Newseum premises, inaugurated in April 2008, is an architectural icon. It can cater to over two million visitors in a year. It is considered a worthy celebration to the First Amendment. The Newseum's motto is 'Window on the World'. It has earned the reputation of being a champion of free expression in the world. It is dedicated to the five freedoms guaranteed in the US – religion, speech, press, assembly and petition.

Exhibits at the Newseum, of front pages of the world's newspapers, including Indian.



Photos: MRD

A screenshot of the Newseum website.

Every day, the Newseum's seven floors exhibit the images and PDF versions of front pages of over 450 newspaper from around the world, including of English and local language dailies from India. In addition, it maintains an archive of front pages carrying reports of notable events since 2001.

Hard copies of select front pages, including one from every US State, are displayed in galleries. A Journalists' Memorial carrying the names of media personnel from around the world who were killed in the line of duty is part of the Newseum. Photographs of members of the Committee to Protect Journalists, ReportersWithout Borders, the International Federation of Journalists and the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers also feature. These exhibits are updated annually.

The Newseum has television studios that have been used by the ABC cable network to broadcast its This Week progammes. Al Jazeera-America (AJM) cable television network, a Qatar-owned TV network which functioned from this studio for some time, was wound up in April 2016 for economic reasons.

The Newseum's most remarkable media exhibits include a 90-foot high screen that shows the latest headlines from around the globe. The Newseum's Media Institute is affiliated to the University of South Dakota, Center for Southern Journalism and Politics with the University of Mississippi and the Vanderbilt University. It conducts seminars organised by Association of Opinion Journalists on topics such as Minority Writers.

The Newseum is funded by donations and the entrance fee of $25 per head. The prohibitive fee limits the visitors but, even so, it records around 80000 footfalls every year. Despite hurdles, the Newseum keeps pursuing its basic media objectives. Recently, it conducted an exhibition of photographs and media coverage on the occasion of former US President John F. Kennedy's death anniversary. ■

(The writer, now living in California, US, is a professor and former head of the Journalism Department at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi.)

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Baahubali transforms dynamics on the silver screen

The Baahubali series demonstrated the tremendous potential latent in Indian cinema, especially the Telugu film industry. Experts -- both in India and abroad -- have asserted that Indian film making is not going to be the same henceforth, says **C.S.H.N. Murthy.** Embracing new audiences overseas as well as at home, and the technological changes that have been adopted in film making have changed the economic dynamics of Indian cinema, he points out

It was 9 am on July 10, 2015. The film Baahubali—The Beginning was screened in 4000 theatres across the globe. The first screening was over at 12 noon. That the film would be a resounding success was obvious. The finesse, the superb integration of technical and visual effects, the screenplay, the actors' performance and the director's skill —were the subjects of critical appreciation in the following few weeks both in India and abroad.

The Hollywood Reporter, The Screen Daily, Huffington Post and *The Guardian* were among the newspapers which published favourable reviews. It was a great turn around for Indian cinema. Paradoxically, some Indian film critics were not as appreciative due to their obsession with post-modernist perspectives such as casteism, feudalism, imperialism and colonialism, etc.

Two years later, on April 28, 2017, the sequel, Baahubali—The Conclusion, was released on 9000 screens across the world. The jubilation over its tremendous success at the box office was several times greater than that of the predecessor. Experts in the film industry -- both in India and abroad -- have asserted that Indian film making is not going to be the same henceforth. The Baahubali series demonstrated the tremendous potential latent in Indian cinema, especially the Telugu film industry.

Mike McCahill of *The Guardian* gave the film four stars out of five, saying the film "could be a blockbuster reboot, or the first blockbuster ever made, a reinvigoration of archetypes that is always entertaining, and often thrilling, to behold".

Future of Indian cinema

Baahubali —The Beginning and its sequel were the highest grocers individually at the Indian box office in the recent past. According to Uday Singh, chairman of Los Angeles Indian Film Council (LAIFC), India is the largest producer of films (over 1000 films per year) with annual ticket sales of nearly 2.8 billion, a $ 1.53 billion growth across international markets every year. According to a recent report from PwC (2017), the Indian media and entertainment (M&E) industry is expected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10.5 per cent to touch $45.1 billion by 2021 from the current $27.3 billion. Baahubali –The Beginning (2015) and Baahubali – The Conclusion (2017) are two examples of the growing investment in Indian film making.

Made at a whopping budget of US$ 27.9 million in Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam and Hindi (dubbed), Baahubali I & II were the most expensive films ever produced in India to date. It was the third highest grossing film worldwide and first ever highest grossing South Indian film, surpassing Enthiran (Robo-2010) of Shankar's direction. Its worldwide box office gross stood at US$ 100.9 million. Its Hindi dubbed version also broke several records by becoming the highest grossing dubbed film in India.

Baahubali – The Conclusion, collecting approximately UD$ 120 million worldwide within just six days of its release, went on to be the first Indian film to gross over US$ 160 million in all languages. However, its stupendous success has raised several fundamental questions about the future of Indian cinema, especially Telugu and South Indian cinema.

Eminent multilingual director Ram Gopal Varma tweeted #@"BB2 impact on Bollywood will be tremendous bcos every super director and superstar for their next blockbuster will have to refer to BB2. Rachit Gupta from *Filmfare* gave it a rating of 4.5/5, stating, "SS Rajamouli's much-awaited sequel is the kind of movie Indian cinema should make regularly. It's the kind of sweeping magnum opus that Indian mythos and culture deserve. It's the biggest film we have ever made and barring a few minor glitches in CGI, this film is possibly the greatest spectacle you'll see on a big screen, in your life."

True, in the last one decade Indian cinema has undergone a number of radical changes in every sphere. Today the revenue that cinema garners for the nation's exchequer has a bearing on its future, be it Hindi (Bollywood), Telugu (Tollywood) or Tamil (Kollywood). Especially, the investments, the distribution chains, satellite rights, overseas distribution of Indian films, functions for release of

Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

posters, teasers and audio discs of newly produced films, and film festivals have given a new face, direction and momentum to Indian cinema.

New yardsticks

Earlier, a film's success was judged by how many weeks/ months it kept the interest of audiences in theatres. Today, this is no longer a yardstick for the success of an Indian film. Starting with the first day's collection, the revenue the film collects for each show is relevant on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, the box-office grossing has become the new yardstick to determine a film's success. On the basis of these figures, films are categorised and placed in different 'clubs': the Billion Dollar Club, Half a Billion Dollar Club, Million Dollar Club, etc. This way of measuring a film's success has added a new dimension to the economics of the industry, resulting in introducing radical changes in the aesthetics of filmmaking.

One of the main reasons for the boom in Indian cinema commerce, be it Bollywood or Tollywood, is the maximisation of revenues due to the change in delivery platform. "It is essential that theatre collections are maximised in a short span, and this is possible if a film is simultaneously released in an optimum number of cinemas," says Puneet Mehrotra of Business World (2016). Just a few years ago, blockbusters involving heroes like Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Aamir Khan, Rajinikant, Chiranjeevi, Kamal Haasan, etc were screened in barely 500 cinemas.

Earlier small/ low budget films were not shown in more than a hundred cinema theatres. However, due to the digitised model of delivery through satellites, movies can now be screened across the world at one go. Thus, the reach of Indian cinema has gradually risen, to between 3000 and 9000 screens across the globe. With the technological manoeuvre, even small budget films have got a boost, with the flexibility to gradually increase the number of screening

theaters as the film's success reports keep coming in through the print and television media.

Shivaji Chatterjee of SVP Hughes Communications says, "Digital cinema has enabled a huge cut in cost of delivery of movies to theaters. Distributors are happy with the new delivery system because earlier 'number of reels to print' was a distributors' risk. Today no distributor loses money because unlike earlier there is no investment in reel cost". Hence, hundred per cent digitalisation of movies is a game changer in defining the future of Indian cinema commerce in a way."

This alone will not suffice; the storytelling and the screenplay have also taken a new turn to meet the stepped up demands of viewers for variety in Indian cinema. For instance, the huge use of graphics and visual effects, with the involvement of overseas graphics agencies, has had a dramatic effect on Telugu and Tamil cinema in the recent past.

In fact, even in low budget films like Eega (2012 directed by Rajamouli) graphics and CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) played a decisive role in the film's success at the box-office. Legacy Effects and the Hong Kong-based visual effects companies Kinomotive Studios and Menfond Electronics are involved in South Indian film making today. Makuta VFX, Firefly in Hyderabad, Tau films in Malaysia, Dancing Digital Animation and Macrograph in South Korea were involved in the making of Baahubali I and II. ■

(The writer is professor and director, Paradigm Institute of Media and Film Studies, Secunderabad.)

Dainik Bhaskar largest circulated multi-edition daily

The largest number of publications registered in any Indian language is Hindi followed by English. Also, registered publications witnessed a growth of 3.58 per cent growth with Uttar Pradesh leading the list of largest number of registered publications followed by Maharashtra. Both the findings were revealed by the latest Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) annual report, Print in India 2016-17, launched on December 15, 2017.

According to the report, there are 114820 number of registered publications. Out of all the Indian language registered publications, Hindi language has most number of publications followed by the English language with numbers standing at 46827 and 14365, respectively. In 2016-17, 4007 new publications were registered and 38 publications were ceased, said the report. *Dainik Bhaskar* is reported to be the largest circulated multi-edition daily followed by *The Times of India* with circulation figures of 4736785 and 4268703, respectively.

The report lists the following:

The largest circulated daily: *Ananda Bazar Patrika,*

Bengali, Kolkata: 1116428

The second largest circulated daily: *The Times of India,*

English, Delhi: 956054

The largest circulated Hindi daily: *Punjab Kesari,*

Jalandhar: 714888

The largest circulated multi-edition daily: *Dainik Bhaskar,*

Hindi (46 editions): 4736785

The second largest circulated multi-edition daily: *The Times of India,* English (33 editions): 4268703

The largest circulated periodical: *The Sunday Times of India,*

English / weekly edition, Delhi: 835269

The largest circulated periodical in Malayalam: *Vanitha* / fortnightly edition, Kottayam: 647104 ■

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)

GASTON ROBERGE

Documentary on a film scholar who made India his home

Master Preacher of Film Theory is a good biographical documentary, the first on a film scholar, Father Gaston Roberge, who migrated to India and made Kolkata his home forever though he had chosen to become God's own man. Credit, **Shoma A. Chatterji** says, goes to K.G. Das for making a film that is fit for the film archives of India

This is the first ever documentary, as far as my knowledge goes, on a film scholar who is originally a migrant from Canada but specialises in Indian cinema. Master Preacher of Film Theory is a graphically detailed documentary on a 'God's man' originally from Canada who created an Indian film theory. The film is made by veteran documentary filmmaker K.G. Das who had earlier worked with the Films Division and also won National Awards for his films.

The film is both his tribute and his *guru dakshina* (tradition of repaying on'e teacher or spiritual guru) to a person he considers his mentor in film theory. The 80-year-old academic and film theorist, Father Gaston Roberge, arrived from French-speaking Montreal to Kolkata in 1961 and his small quarters, filled with books on his neat table complete with a desktop computer and printer, is meaningfully set against a beautiful charcoal sketch of his favourite filmmaker, Satyajit Ray.

Provided by: K.G. Das

Gaston Roberge.

Father Roberge talks with a distinct lisp that adds to the charm of a very grounded personality who talks ever so slowly, permitting each syllable and consonant to sink deeply into the mind of the listener. When asked what motivated him to make the film, Das says, "I decided to create this cinematic tribute to this great man because, as a filmmaker of long standing, I felt indebted to make this film," adding, "I had heard his speech at the Jeebonanda Sabhagriha in the Nandan Complex during the celebration of 60 years of Pather Panchali which triggered in him the desire to study Indian cinema differently and create a theory of Indian cinema from the understanding and knowledge he had gleaned from this film and others."

Das has adopted a no-nonsense, narrative structure that focuses on Father Roberge during his lectures at St Xaviers, or elaborating on how a specific scene in Pather Panchali impressed him deeply, or, holding forth on Indian cinema at the Nadia Archive founded and run by Basudeb Mandal who generously agreed to produce the film. Father Roberge has almost totally lost his hearing and the Church he belongs to has given him an expensive hearing aid but this does not affect the film at all though Das found it difficult to place his conversations with Father on film at certain moments.

In his book, *To View Movies The Indian Way* (2007), Father Roberge focuses on guiding the audience on interpreting Indian cinema through the lens of Indian culture, which he feels is lacking in critical and scholarly review of Indian film. "To understand Indian film, one must go back to Bharat-Muni and his Natya Shastra," he says.

Father Roberge says at one point in the film that for him, just coming from one country to a new one by boat with a passport and a visa, landing on the ground of the city does not translate actually into "coming to a different country". "You have to know the people in order to arrive at a new country," says Father. On his way to Kolkata, the ship made a one-night halt at New York and Father learnt that a trilogy of Indian films was being screened in the city. He made use of that one night by visiting the cinemas and watching all the three stories of Apu through the night.

"I was deeply impressed by that particular scene in Pather Panchali where the sister Durga and her brother Apu are clandestinely sharing some sour pickles unknown to their stern mother. I discovered that while these two children were sharing a secret joy of eating pickles, we, the audience, were sharing their joy in a different way." This is what shook him forever and Indian cinema became his passion, his love and his commitment.

The film is intercut with the subdued voice-over of Jagannath Guha when Father Roberge is not talking and backed by the low-key music by the director himself. Master Preacher of Film Theory becomes a

film truly fit for the archive that will become a learning experience for film lovers, film students and film critics and scholars for all time. Das has provided diversion and relief through still photographs of Father Roberge with different personalities like Satyajit Ray, Mother Theresa and so on besides backing Father's explanations about his idea of an Indian film theory with original clips from Pather Panchali, Raja Harishchandra, Sholay, Debi and Ivan the Terrible, a film he has explored and analysed differently from the way it was analysed before.

The film, spanning 39 minutes of screening time, captures, in slices, montages and narrations mainly in the first person, the long career of an unusual man who came from Canada as a priest and stayed on for 60 long years using the time to create and evolve his Indian Theory of Film. It is a simple, straightforward narration that mainly follows the 80+ Father, now hard of hearing who has authored not less than 35 books on different aspects of cinema, mainly Indian cinema and taught cinema to hundreds of students many of who in course of time, became noted directors and even dedicated their first film to this great teacher.

"Cinema is an imaginary experience triggered by audiovisual projections of visuals, sound and music on screen," says Father Roberge at one point. He says that it is necessary for the mass audience to decide on a film's destiny, that is, whether they like a given film in large numbers or not and gives the example of the Bangladeshi mainstream hit Beder Meye Jyotsna. The voice-over also focusses on Father's working out a fine balance between his priestly responsibilities within the church as a Jesuit father and his teaching assignments bridged by his writing of books, mainly on cinema and some on theology. ■

(The writer is a senior journalist and film historian based in Kolkata. She has won the National Award for Best Writing on Cinema twice, the Bengal Film Journalists Association Award, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from Laadly-UNFPA. This article had appeared in a different version in Silhouette Magazine.*)*

I&B Ministry introduces single-point online service

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting issued a notification on January 3 informing broadcasters about the provision of online submission of applications for change of channel name, logo etc. and other services such as foreign remittance proposals.

"It is requested that hereon all such applications should be made online only through the web portal www.broadcastseva.gov.in," the notice read, making it mandatory for all broadcasters to use the online service for submitting their applications. According to the notice, applications for temporary uplinking, permission to set up a teleport, foreign remittance, change of satellite, channel name/logo, language of channel, category of channel, mode of transmission, teleport and teleport location are available on the government portal.

The notice also added, "Annual permission fee module is active and payment of annual permission fee should be made online only."

The website says this move is in keeping with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiative for Ease of Doing Business, Digital India and Make in India and "provides a single point facility to the various stakeholders and applicants to make their applications for various permission, registrations, licences, etc. issued by MIB for broadcast related activities." ■

Bengali children's literature – a forgotten resource?

The Bengali language has a tradition of excellent literature for children. Just recently, Nabaneeta Dev Sen was honoured with the Big Little Book Award. But how aware is the Bengali Diaspora about this excellent way of keeping roots strong? **Mou Mukherjee-Das** goes back in time while trying to find out

In July 2017, when Nabaneeta Dev Sen was awarded the BLBA (Big Little Book Award), no media house covered the news. This undoubtedly innovative initiative by TATA Trusts and Literature Live to honour authors for their contribution to children's literature in Indian languages was hampered by the missing communication element.

Bengali literature is full of stories for children and rhymes called *chcharas* that have been passed down through generations. The rhymes are often peopled by imaginary creatures, such as the Hattim a Tim Tim (*Hattim a tim-tim/ Tara mathe pare dim*) created by noted poet Ananda Shanker Ray), and children with magical capabilities, like Khokon, the little boy who can cross a river in a boat pulled by seven crows (*Khokon khokon korey maye*). The *chcharas* transcend social and other barriers and have a spontaneity and magnetism that catches the fancy of children.

The golden era of children's literature was marked by the emergence of writers like Dakshinaranjan Mitra Mazumder, Upendra Kishore Ray Choudhury, Dinesh Chandra Sen and many others. The first children's magazine, *Digdarshan*, was brought out by the missionaries in Serampore in 1818, followed by *Pashwabali* in 1822.

The publishing of children's stories started with special puja editions, with many established authors contributing a story or two for children. The *Shuktara* of Dev Sahitya Kutir publication house was the most sought after puja edition, and *Kishore Bharati, Mouchak and Ramdhanu* caught up with it later.

Phantom, created by Lee Falk in the USA, was the earliest English comic strip to be published in Bengali newspapers. In fact, Phantom comics were published in many Indian languages. But the earliest Bengali comic strip was Shiyal Pandit, created by Pratul Chandra Lahiri for the *Jugantar* newspaper. *Shuktara* and *Kishore Bharati* published cartoons like Nonte-Phonte, Handa-Bhoda and Batul the Great, alongside Phantom and Tintin by Belgium cartoonist Georges Remi.

More and more authors started to bring out children's magazines -- *Gyanoday (1831), Vidya Darpan (1853), Satya Pradip (1860), Rahasya Sandarva (1863) and Abodh Bandhu (1873)* were among them. During the period, the first novel for Indian children was brought out by Wood, an Englishwoman. It was called *Chhoto Henry*. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar also brought out novels for children, although they were mostly educational in intent. Madan Mohan Tarkalankar brought out the first anthologies of poems for children in Bengali – *Padyamala* and *Padyapath*. Later, collections of stories by Dakshinaranjan and Upendra Kishore, including folktales, fairytales and funny stories from Bengal became bestsellers and continue to be favourites with children.

Pictures provided by: MMD

Cover pages of cartoon comics Handa-Bhoda (left) and Batul-the great (right).

Khirer Putul (1896) brought out by Abanindranath Tagore is another timeless classic. The story *Goopi Gyne Bagha Byne* (fantasy, adventure and comedy) was made into a film by Satyajit Ray. Ray brought out a popular children's magazine called *Sandesh*, the editorship of which was later taken over by his son, Sukumar Ray, one of the most brilliant and loved writers for children. His collections of poems Abol Tabol (The Weird and the Absurd) and HaJaBaRaLa (Mumbo-Jumbo) are still most popular among children of all ages.

As children's literature emerged as a new genre, more and more writers experimented with forms like adventure stories, science fiction, sports, comics and detective stories. Jagadish Chandra Bose and Hemendra Kumar Roy wrote science fiction, Moti Nandy wrote stories around sports, Manoranjan Bhattacharya wrote the first Bengali detective story for children, followed by Satyajit Ray, who was famous for his Feluda series, and Bhibuti Bhusan Bandopadhyay who wrote *Chander Pahar*, the first adventure story for children in Bengali.

Authors starting from Ashapurna Devi and Mahasweta Devi to Sunil Gangopadhyay (Kakababu series) have written books for children. Narayan Debnath, Narayan Gangopadhyay, Sashtipada Chattopadhya, Sukumar Ray and Shibram Chakroborty have produced classics. Narayan Debnath, the first and the only comic strip creator to receive a D Litt degree in India, has scripted and drawn comic strips continuously for the past 50 years (Handa Bhoda series).

Chalachittachanchari by Sukumar Ray, another masterpiece, is considered to be equal in quality to Alice in Wonderland, the famous children's classic by Lewis Carroll. Some modern day writers like Nabaneeta Deb Sen, Sahitya Akademi winner Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, Amarendra Chakravorty and Kartik Ghosh have been nominated for various awards in children's literature.

If series like Harry Potter, Tintin, Asterix and Batman can a have such a huge fan base, then the cornucopia of Bengali children's literature is also sure to win the hearts of millions of Bengali kids spread across the globe. What better way of bonding with roots and culture? ■

(The writer is an educator who is presently engaged in research work on cartoons and media literacy of children and their impact. Her areas of interest include media studies and new media.)

Kannada Prabha celebrates 50 years of publication

Kannada Prabha, is one amongst the oldest serving and most trusted Kannada dailies in Karnataka. It has just turned 50 years old . *Kannada Prabha* was founded in 1967 by Gandhian freedom fighter, Ramnath Goenka, who was also a politician, businessman and a media mogul. It has inherited the ideals of its founder and has been practising straight, bold and relentless journalism, since its first issue on the 4th November, 1967. The paper was part of Indian Express' fight against the Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi in 1975. It also played an active role in Indian Express' campaign against Ms.Gandhi, and was instrumental in creating a public opinion in favour of the first non-Congress government at the Centre 1977.

Under the editorship of Khadri Shamanna, *Kannada Prabha* took a valiant stand on issues of the state and its people. The newspaper's support in favour of the fight against Hindi imposition, the Gokak Agitation, the Cauvery dispute are a few examples of its pro-people reportage. It has also scripted many firsts in Kannada journalism: from publishing PUC results, to bringing out a special supplement on the occasion of Deepavali; to publishing weekly exclusive magazines for women, magazines related to commerce, cinema and health; as well as, printing daily calendar pages and publishing daily serials.

Kannada Prabha's journalistic breakthroughs also include, a separate column for legal matters, students, Kannada comics and colour printing. Celebrating the 50th Anniversary, the January 18th issue was a 134 page collector's edition which received rave reviews from readers and advertisers. The publication is now part of Asianet News Network Media Group. With its strong digital news portal, *Kannada Prabha* is accessible to Kannadigas all over the world and with its sister News TV channel Suvarna News, advertisers have an unbeatable combination to reach the Kannada speaking markets. ■

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)

The romance of watching this classic simply never wears off

It is the most watched movie in history. Whether on the wide screen or on TV, on YouTube or on the mobile, no film has been seen by more people than Casablanca and this does not come as a surprise. On the 75th anniversary of its release, **Partab Ramchand** analyses why the film is considered a cult classic

Casablanca has remained every moviegoer's favourite film and its outstanding qualities have charmed and enraptured audiences now for 75 years. Yes, this year marks the platinum jubilee of the general release of the classic which noted film critic Andrew Sarris summed up succinctly by terming it as "the most decisive exception to the auteur theory".

No film has had the sort of universal appeal more than the Warner Brothers presentation, which was produced by Hal Wallis and directed by Michael Curtiz. It is cinema par excellence, a studio bound Hollywood melodrama which has emerged impeccably into one of the outstanding entertainment experiences in cinema history with romance, intrigue, excitement, suspense and humour expertly deployed by master technicians and a perfect cast. Truly, if one were to take just one movie with him on a desert island it would be Casablanca.

The unforgettable characters and the witty and tense dialogue exchanges are amongst the most cherished memories of Casablanca. The mention of Rick Blaine, Ilsa Lund and Victor Laszlo immediately bring to mind the three principal actors, Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman and Paul Henreid, but even Capt Louis Renault (Claude Rains), Ferrari (Sydney Greenstreet), Ugarte (Peter Lorre), Major Strasser (Conrad Veidt) and Sam (Dooley Wilson) bring to mind many memorable moments of the film. Even the so called bit players make the most of their screen time.

The fact that as many as six lines from the film's dialogue – the most for any single movie – appear in the American Film Institute's '100 years, 100 movie quotes' list stands testimony to the witty and taut screenplay by the Epstein twins, Julius and Philip, with Howard Koch chipping in.

Technically, too, the film cannot be faulted with Arthur Edeson's camerawork brilliantly catching the 'film noir' mood of the movie while the editing by Owen Marks is crisp with each scene blending smoothly with the next. Both received Oscar nominations for their work as did Max Steiner for his immortal score that enhances the enduring qualities of Casablanca.

Bogart and Rains narrowly missed out the Oscars for best actor and best supporting actor but the film could not be deprived of Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Director and the script. Curtiz, a master craftsman, helped maintain interest in the proceedings with swift direction while, with the experienced Wallis in charge of the film production,

Photos: Internet

This iconic picture from Casablanca reflected the remarkable chemistry between Bogart and Bergman.

values were predictably high. And though created under the most extraordinary conditions of haste and confusion with new pages of the script being delivered as shooting progressed and the players uncertain of the ending, it has the contrary look of a thoughtfully prepared and lovingly crafted romantic melodrama.

Almost every film classic has scenes that live in memory for long but in this aspect Casablanca probably outshines any other picture. There are simply too many to be retold and like the characters and the dialogue even the song 'As time goes by' is part of cinema folklore. The ultimate tribute to Casablanca is that no one needs to be told of the plot as everyone is well aware of it.

Even away from the film proper the enduring stories that characterise the making of Casablanca and other tales associated with it are part of cinema history and very much part of a book, *The Making of Casablanca.* The strange chemistry between Bogart and Bergman underlined by the latter's famous quote, "I kissed him but I never really knew him", the fact that no one really knew how the movie would end and who Bergman would end up with and that the film's original leads as announced were Ronald Reagan, Ann Sheridan and Dennis Morgan – hese are the only the start of the innumerable stories that almost every filmgoer is well aware of.

One of the last scenes in the film where Bogart and Bergman go their separate ways, much against her wishes.

In the ultimate analysis one has to say that the respected film critic of *The New York Times* Bosley Crowther got it absolutely spot on. "A picture which makes the spine tingle and the heart take a leap. They have so combined sentiment, humour, and pathos with taut melodrama and bristling intrigue that the result is a highly entertaining and even inspiring film." Although the initial release date for Casablanca was anticipated for early 1943, the film premiered at the Hollywood Theater in New York City on November 26, 1942, to coincide with the Allied invasion of North Africa and the capture of Casablanca It went into general release however on January 23, 1943, to take advantage of the Casablanca Conference, a high level meeting in the city between British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and American president Franklin Roosevelt.

Thanks to modern technology, Casablanca continues to bewitch the generations who were born well after its release. I for one saw the film for the first time at the American Centre auditorium in 1972 when I was a youthful cinema enthusiast. Since then, the next generation is already familiar with the film and of course future generations too will have the opportunity to appreciate the classic that is Casablanca. ■

(The writer is a senior sports journalist who has more than a passing interest in cinema.)

The film is set in a nightclub and gambling den in Casablanca during World War II. The place is visited by refugees from France and Germany eager to get to the US.

SPORT

India's pace bowling attack comes of age

As a witness to the farce that the Indian new ball attack was in the 1960s and early 1970s, **Partab Ramchand** is amazed at the metamorphosis of the Indian pace bowling line-up these days and is of the view that the current phase could well turn out to be the golden age of Indian fast bowling

As one who observed closely the farce that was the Indian new ball attack in the 1960s and early 1970s I am amazed at the metamorphosis I see in the pace attack of today. Five fast bowlers in the team to tour South Africa and matching anything that the home team's quartet of fiery pace bowlers can hurtle down is something that not even the most optimistic followers of Indian cricket would have envisaged some half a century ago.

It's such a joy to watch the Indian pace attack giving as much as the opponents are able to dish out. It has been particularly gratifying for someone like me who has been witness to the time when the new ball bowling was a joke, when Eknath Solkar and M.L. Jaisimha were regular opening bowlers and those in charge of the new ball included the likes of M.A.K. Pataudi, Salim Durrani, Ajit Wadekar, Budhi Kunderan, V. Subramanyam and Sunil Gavaskar. The sight of Bishen Bedi warming up even as the first over was being sent down and coming on to bowl the third over of the innings was a common sight in those days.

Spin bowling has traditionally been India's strength but, of course, since Kapil Dev burst upon the scene in 1978 pace bowlers too have played starring roles in many of India's victories. Even if there are signs that Ishant Sharma, for long the spearhead of the pace attack, is in decline, the feats of Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shammi and Umesh Yadav have really attracted considerable attention all over the cricketing world. All of them have got time and age on their side and they are bound to get even better with the benefit of further experience.

These days, the new ball attack is anything but a joke or a farce. The present set is the best compared to the numerous fast bowlers that have appeared on the Indian cricketing horizon since Kapil's arrival. The Haryana Hurricane has been an unparalleled inspiration and thanks to him the pace bowling revolution commenced in this country. Whoever would have thought in the dark ages of half a century ago that India would one day produce a pace bowler who would be the highest wicket taker in Tests? Soon, many other world class pace bowlers appeared on the scene and among them Javagal Srinath and Zaheer Khan were the best. India's improved display internationally in the 1980s, 90s and in the New Millennium was as much due to pace bowling as the traditional strengths of batting and spin bowling.

The present set of pace bowlers has played its part in making India the No. 1 ranked team in Tests and No. 2 in ODIs. The feeling was always there that if they could perform so well in Subcontinental pitches there was every reason to believe that they would bowl even more menacingly on the bouncier and faster pitches abroad.

The first Test against South Africa at Cape Town proved this in no uncertain terms. The game might have been lost because of poor batting but there was nothing but praise for the pace trio of Bhuvneshwar, Shammi and Bumrah who matched the much more experienced quartet of Morne Morkel, Dale Steyn, Vernon Philander and Kagiso Rabada in every aspect of the fast bowler's craft. The manner in which they bowled out the formidable South African batting line-up restricting them to totals of 286 and 130 constituted pace bowling of the highest class.

The great thing about the present set of Indian pacemen is the variety in their bowling. All the qualities that go into the making of a good fast bowler are in ample evidence. Pace, swing and accuracy is their forte and the batsmen up against them know they have a task on their hands. They have to display concentration, determination and technical application of the highest level to combat these bowlers who are always looking for weaknesses in the armour.

Like all good fast bowlers they give India the early breakthrough and when it comes to bowling at the death in limited overs cricket they are among the best in the game. They can never really be collared as numerous top batsmen have found out much to their dismay. The bouncers and yorkers are used judiciously and in the middle overs they are able to stifle the runs besides picking up a wicket or two. And in a tight situation they are able to hold their nerve as they have demonstrated on many occasions. ■

When an editor made a reporter's innings memorable

In his 50th year as a professional sports writer, **Partab Ramchand** looks back on the 12 years he was the Madras correspondent for *Sportsworld* and relates why these were the best years of his career

I am into my 50th year as a professional sports writer and as only to be expected the long journey leaves me with a blur of memories. Sure, I remember the significant matches I covered, the important people I have met or interviewed and have pleasant memories of those who have touched my life along the extended period. But the happiest memories would be the 12 years spent as Madras correspondent for *Sportsworld* magazine brought out by the Ananda Bazar Group of publications in Calcutta from 1982 to 1994.

As far as my work was concerned, I was given a free hand, my colleagues at the head office always respected the opinions of the man on the spot. But the chief reason for the pleasant time during the period was the fact that I had David McMahon as my immediate boss.

To say that David was the nicest person I met in my life would be an understatement. He couldn't do a mean thing even if he tried. We hit it off during our first meeting in July 1982 when I took over from Ashok Kamath who was going to Calcutta to join *The Telegraph* newspaper, which was just being launched. I was senior to him in age and in the profession by a few years and when Ashok introduced us David exclaimed, "Oh, this is the great Partab Ramchand. Well, who has not heard of him!" How can you not like a person who greets you for the first time in this fashion?

Working with David was a dream. We were 1000 miles apart and communication was through the teleprinter or phone. But his instructions were always polite, his voice remained soft, however harassed he might have been at the *Sportsworld* desk in Calcutta. He didn't bark out his instructions, but only made suggestions. "Why don't you work on such and such story?" he would ask, and gave me a few angles on which to base my queries. And whenever I came up with a story idea and discussed it with him he was always receptive to them and encouraged me to go ahead.

People have said nice things about me during my long career but the best tribute was paid by David. He wanted me send a feature story and set a deadline. Unfortunately, while working on it I became unwell and so just missed the deadline in sending it. I sent him a teleprinter message apologising, explaining to him that it happened because I was taken ill. I remember his reply to this day. "Don't worry about it. I know you must have been very ill because you are the kind of guy who will send his copy even if you in an oxygen tent." Why won't anyone do anything for a guy like that?

On another occasion, being a tennis enthusiast (he covered Wimbledon for many years), David wanted to do a lengthy cover story on the Amritraj brothers and suggested that we do it together and whether I could make arrangements for the interview. Getting the globe-trotting Amritraj family together for an interview in the early 1980s when Anand and Vijay were at their peak was not very easy but somehow I managed it. After the interview was over, a pleased as punch David said as we were leaving the Amritraj residence on Sterling Road: "Now I know why your initials are PR (meaning public relations)."

I did make a few visits to Calcutta during those 12 years and what a joy they were! The *Sportsworld* team was a young one, full of energetic, enthusiastic but knowledgeable members. Under David's benign guidance they produced some of the best work done by magazine reporters (it was a weekly which later became a fortnightly). They also had some of the best young writers in the land, notably Andy O'Brien and Rohit Brijnath. When David migrated to Australia in 1988, Andy took over as associate editor before he too migrated to Australia in the late 1990s.

Working with them was a pleasure, for the team members were full of fun and fresh ideas. But relaxing with them was even more enjoyable. They worked hard for five days and made the most of the weekends, loving their food, drink and camaraderie at the Calcutta Cricket and Football Club. Some weekends they were off to Puri in Orissa to spend time at the famous beach there.

In 1994, I took over as sports editor at *The New Indian Express* in Madras and that meant saying goodbye to the *Sportsworld* gang. The memories, however, remain and sometimes I wish we could all meet up again and recall the great days we all spent together in the 1980s and 90s. Who knows, maybe that time will come. ■

Well, no wonder men are just men!

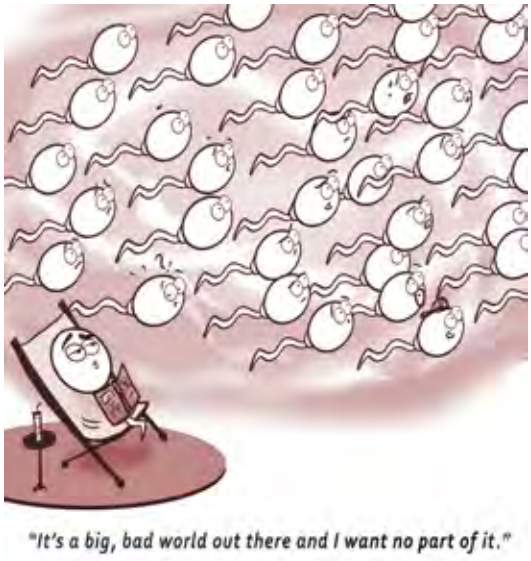
Reams and reams have been written trying to explain why men and women are the way they are. From claiming that they are from different planets to going into their traditional roles in prehistoric times, everything has been tried. **Dr Manju Gupta** presents a fascinating theory based on reproductive biology

There is no medical-ese ahead and you won't get lost in long winding words. We all know that a baby is made by the union of the mother's ovum and the father's sperm. So let me take it from there.

First a little on the development of the ovum. There are two ovaries in a women's body and at the beginning of a menstrual cycle both gear up to form follicles which house the ova. Many follicles begin this journey but once one outgrows the others and becomes dominant the rest recede. This allows their chosen representative to get enough nutrition and grow unhindered. Such is the sense of purpose in these follicles that if per chance more than one matures there is a risk of conceiving twins, triplets and more.

Now, once a month, at the designated time, this mature follicle ruptures and releases the ovum in the peritoneal cavity. For those who don't grasp the enormity of the statement, let's just say that it is a space big enough to get lost in. But this ovum with single-minded determination finds its way up the funnel-shaped end of the fallopian tube and travels to the cavernous ampulla for its rendezvous with the sperm.

On the other side, in what can only be called a colossal waste of protoplasm, billions of sperms are released with each ejaculation. Such is the mob mentality of this overzealous tailed cell that it cannot function without its peers for company. So much so, that although it takes only one sperm to fertilise the ovum, even millions of them are said to be too few to get the job done. These sperms, teeming with nervous energy, are deposited quite close to their destination but get lost in all types of crevices and spaces because they are too arrogant to ask for directions. They run amok, driven by a sole purpose but, sadly, with no game plan. Finally, a few thousand, more out of good fortune than anything else, catch sight of the ovum and race each other to reach it.



"It's a big, bad world out there and I want no part of it."

Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

Biologically speaking, only one sperm is required for fertilisation and the ovum knows this. For that matter, the sperms also know this but don't care. Once a sperm enters, the ovum tries to make the sperms see sense by making its walls impregnable, the equivalent of hanging a 'house full' board. But the sperms cannot take no for an answer and keep trying anyway. In the process, many are beheaded and maimed. Their fate does not stop more from banging against the walls and getting killed too.

Now sometimes, due to a freak accident of nature, persistence pays off and two sperms manage to fertilise the ovum. In such a scenario two things are known to happen. Sometimes the maternal nucleus excuses herself and leaves the sperm nuclei to their own devices. In their misguided notion of self sufficiency, the paternal nuclei try the baby-building business on their own and end up with a bunch of grapes called a molar pregnancy. At other times, the sperm nuclei force the maternal nucleus to stay and do the job. This union results in a pregnancy which is partly molar and never viable. There is a limit to what coercion can yield!

Aristotle averred that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We can infer from this cell theory that women are determined, smart, organised and know what they want. Men, well, are just men! ■

(The writer is a gynaecologist. She blogs at alifeextraordinarilyordinary.com about the trials and tribulations of living in a small town of Haryana.)

TRAVEL

Tips for an enriching break from the routine

Mindset is the key to any travel programme. If you approach travel as an adventure without unrealistic expectations, but have a clear idea of what you want to do or see at your destination, how much money you can afford to spend and how many days you can spare, then it is the best way to broaden your horizons, boost your confidence and find peace of mind, says **Dr Sumithra Shanmugham**

Some just like to travel merely to escape from the city and months of pounding the pavements and the keyboard. They want to slough off emails and Facebook updates, and be free to salute the sun in the mornings, spend afternoons in the hammock and evenings and nights just relaxing. Senior citizens might want to undertake long, slow journeys, not for the purpose of ticking destinations off a list, but simply to cultivate their minds. Whatever the reason, travel is not just another activity; it can be an enriching break from the routine.

Photo: SS

A magnificient view of the Cindarella Castle in Bavaria.

Here's a cheat sheet for a pleasurable travel experience:

- Choose a destination
- Choose congenial travelling companions
- Decide what you want to do at your destination of choice
- If you are an art lover, you can put museums and galleries showcasing antique and contemporary culture on your agenda
- If you are a nature lover, chalk out programmes like nature walks, trekking and even water-based activities like scuba diving and snorkeling
- If you are a foodie, make a list of eateries that cater to your taste buds
- If you want to help the less-privileged while you enjoy yourself, there are hotels which support street children or old age homes. You can also arrange to spend time with disabled children. Visit under-developed nations, and see how you can be of support

The world is a book and those who don't travel read only one page. – Augustine Hippo

Once in a year, go someplace you have never been before. – The Dalai Lama

Broad wholesome charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all the time. – Mark Twain

Investment in travel is an investment in yourself. - Mathew Karsten, Blogger

Hasad se dil agar afsurda hai, garm-e-tamasha ho,
Ki chashm-e-tang shayad kasrat-e-nazzara se va ho

This Mirza Ghalib ghazal translates as: "If you are feeling oppressed by negative thoughts, go see the world. The spectacle you encounter will perhaps open up your narrow vision."

- If you love luxury, there are stunningly restored palaces and royal residences, complete with sparkling lakes and gorgeous greenery, where you can soak up opulence
- If you are looking for a romantic getaway, you can choose from an array of destinations that will heighten the emotions and lay down memories for ever

And if you like to get off the beaten track, try Gautamala (for its rich Mayan experience), Georgia (to see the less explored side of Europe) and Kenya, (to enjoy serene safari lodges).

No doubt you may encounter flight delays, go a couple of days without a shower or be forced to subsist on minimalistic airline meals, but just forget the potholes on the road and enjoy the journey; take back memories and leave your footprints behind.

I conclude with the words of Sir Richard Burton: "The gladdest moment in human life, methinks, is a departure upon a distant journey into unknown lands". ■

(The writer is an obstetrician and gynaecologist who has a passion for writing. She has served as president of the Woman Doctors Association of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.)

HostingJournalist.com ties up with Online TalentLab BV

HostingJournalist.com (https://hostingjournalist.com), a fast-growing global daily news portal attracting targeted visitors from around the world within the cloud, hosting and data centre business segment, announced a strategic alliance agreement with OnlineTalentLab BV – a Dutch web development company focused on digital publishing innovation with its cross-border business operations in the Netherlands as well as Germany. OnlineTalentLab is part of a family of global media brands owned by international media entrepreneur Donald Wiedemeyer.

The first result of the strategic alliance with OnlineTalentLab BV is the re-launch of the HostingJournalist.com daily news portal including a new logo and colour schemes as well as a variety of added editorial and advertising features, with new display banner advertising as well as native advertising (content marketing) options. Next to the new platform deployment with high levels of social media integration, the website release includes YouTube-based company video feeds. This way, HostingJournalist.com expects to further improve the overall visitor experience as well as the visitor time spent on their website. It would also provide cloud, hosting and data center industry companies the opportunity to significantly improve the visibility of their corporate videos and reach target audiences, with videos already posted on their YouTube company channels.

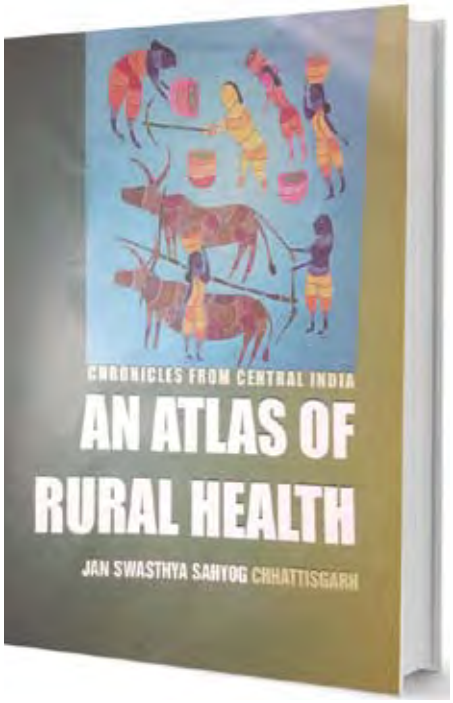
Founded in 2013, HostingJournalist.com is a global technology niche news portal focusing on cloud, hosting and data centre services. With its daily news feed, seven days a week, as well as in-depth interviews and opinion articles, HostingJournalist.com is aiming its highly targeted online media services at visitors around the globe. The media outlet continues to show strong readership growth across the world and has a strong geographical audience reach in the United States, Israel, and Western Europe. The added editorial and advertising features on the re-launched HostingJournalist.com news portal further include: a specific form where industry experts can upload their expert blogs; cloud, hosting and data center industry events; newsletter subscription; a searchable company directory with map visuals for data center locations (soon to launch); and more.

The strategic alliance with OnlineTalentLab BV, part of a family of global media brands owned by international media entrepreneur Donald Wiedemeyer, located in Bemmel, the Netherlands, would enable HostingJournalist.com to instantly add a wealth of innovative publishing know-how and online development skills to bring the global operations of this daily online news portal to the next level.

"Since 2013, we've managed to grow the HostingJournalist.com news portal to over 20000 unique monthly visitors globally and more than 200000 monthly page views, while attracting targeted visitors from a wide range of different countries throughout the globe," says Koen Stegeman, editor-in-chief and founder of HostingJournalist.com. "Most of our visitors come from the US, Israel and Western Europe, but we're aiming for true global reach. The alliance with Donald Wiedemeyer and OnlineTalentLab provides us the opportunity to add instant innovative digital publishing power. Besides that, we also plan to invest in added power for our hosting and SEO infrastructure to further enhance the HostingJournalist.com reader and advertiser experiences."

"As most of the media brands we own are focused on global niches and rich content with high added value, I know exactly what the value is of a highly targeted technology news portal with global reach like the HostingJournalist.com brand," said Donald Wiedemeyer. "With the right infrastructural and operational investments, I expect the HostingJournalist.com brand to significantly enhance their reach as well as its reader satisfaction and advertiser fulfillment, and soon become a top-5 player in its niche worldwide. ■

Establishing the socio-economic context of disease



AN ATLAS OF RURAL HEALTH – CHRONICLES FROM CENTRAL INDIA
Publisher: Jan Swasthya Sahyog, Chhattisgarh
Price: Rs 400
Pages: 318

While treating patients, doctors ask about the symptoms, conduct clinical examinations and call for various tests to be done. However meticulous they are, one critical component is almost always missing in doctors' efforts to understand disease – the socio-economic conditions in which patients live, some aspects of which may be very relevant, particularly in preventing recurrence or spread of the ailment. It is in this context that a recent publication is noteworthy.

An Atlas of Rural Health – Chronicles from Central India has been prepared by the Jan Swasthya Sahyog (JSS), an initiative of doctors and other medical workers who are committed to serving some of the poorest people in very remote villages. This organiSation is based in Chhattisgarh and covers people in Madhya Pradesh as well. Jan Swasthya Sahyog doctors familiarise themselves with poverty, hunger and other problems of their patients.

I accompanied Dr Yogesh Jain, a senior, internationally acclaimed doctor affiliated to JSS, when he went to meet two leprosy patients at their native village. Dr Jain had earlier treated them at the hospital but was travelling to their remote village in order to understand the background. We met one of the patients while he was working on his farm and then went back with him to his house so that we could meet the entire family. Many important dimensions began to emerge in the course of the detailed conversation the doctor had with the family. The possibility of the children contracting the disease came up, and after preliminary examination they, too, were asked to report to the hospital, so that they would benefit from early diagnosis and treatment if needed.

Says Dr Jain says in his introduction to the Atlas: "While we have tried to document disease patterns and distribution among the populace and occasionally published them in peer reviewed journals, we have also felt the need to explore and to understand their causes – not just their proximate biomedical causes but also the social, economic and cultural roots of these diseases. As physicians and health workers interested primarily in the whys and hows of health and disease and with the primary objective of reducing inequity in health care among rural and tribal poor, we have also investigated regimes of political and economic values and policies that condition tacit aspects of socio-cultural practices that in turn impact the cause and occurrence of disease – specifically, the role of structural violence. So, in a sense, this book is also about the political economy of the ailments of the rural and tribal poor in India."

Dr Jain explains that the book has been called an 'atlas' because it records the journey of specific ailments through time and includes graphics to highlight causes. "We went back to the patient, to his/her family, hamlet and village, and thus we discovered the geographic, cultural, social and economic predicaments that lay behind the illness."

The Atlas has 27 detailed reports with pictures on various diseases and ailments. In addition, there are about 50 short picture stories on other diseases. This is complemented by several other useful features. On the whole, it is a very useful and interesting book on public health. The Hindi edition is expected to be published shortly. ■

(Reviewed by Bharat Dogra.)

REMEMBERING RITWIK GHATAK

Using violence brilliantly as a metaphor for life's decay

November 4 last year marked Ritwik Ghatak's 92nd birth anniversary. **Shoma A. Chatterji** explains how his unforgettable classic, Meghe Dhaka Tara, paints a brutally frank picture in stark black and white images, of the family as a cannibalistic consumer of one of its own members

The characters come in stark black and white. Nita, her father and Shankar are the 'white' characters. Gita, Montu and their mother are the 'black' ones. Sanat is somewhere in the middle of the two extremes. He is weak, spineless, indecisive and, finally, as cannibalistic towards Nita as the others. In Meghe Dhaka Tara, Ghatak seamlessly weaves in violence as metaphors.

The Shorter Oxford Dictionary says "violence is inflicting injury or damage to a person or property". Violence thrives in the victim's acceptance of the victimiser's moral right, social superiority and physical power. These myths could have been exploded through effective protests, but this has been fractional.

When oppressed and marginal groups like women, the Dalits and the poor, protest against violence to their person by men, other women, social groups or government machineries, they are again made victims of violence for their 'guts' to protest. Covert or overt, direct or indirect, visible or invisible, structural or social, oppressed groups are always, both targets and victims of violence across the world.

Violence is often much subtler than we have been made to understand. It forms part of a complex that involves social institutions and the way in which these institutions are organised in terms of framing relationships between their members – men and women, men and men, women and women, men, women and children, boss and subordinate, rich and poor, employed and unemployed, and so on. Power may be a balance of advantage or an inequality of resources within a household, at the workplace or in a larger institution. Organisational control, of which the Indian family is a microcosm, is pervasive, subtle and determined by the ideologies they are based on.

Nita accepts the family's 'moral' right to control her on the basis of its emotional power over her. These are elements that thrive in her acceptance of her victimisers – her family and Sanat, the man she loves. She once confesses to Sanat: "My sin is that I have never ever expressed by protest against any wrong. Really, I should not have been quite so ordinary." "Ordinary" here is a pointer to the unquestioned acceptance and tolerance of violence by women like Nita.

Violence exists in Nita being coerced to give up her music, an art she is genuinely talented in. She is denied the right to continue her studies, suggesting the violence of denial. She is not even aware that her economic responsibility vests her with power. Would she have used her power had she been aware of it? Not really, because she is simply not made that way. Her 'chemistry' is different. Her changed status within the family — from being a young woman with simple dreams of marriage and education – to one who is burdened with a responsibility she buckles under – does not change her in any way to make her use, misuse and abuse her power. In Nita's case, violence sets a strikingly unusual example of the weak exploiting the 'powerful.'

Photo: SC

The enigmatic Ghatak.

Interestingly, Nita's example does not necessarily throw up notions of gender violence based on patriarchy. Violence within Meghe Dhaka Tara is gender-neutral. The film presents a classic example of the violators being victims themselves. It throws up the reality of the victim becoming the victimiser. Every single character of Meghe Dhaka Tara is a victim of circumstances. Every single character victimises Nita, manipulating her emotionally.

Nita's mother is victim of repeated pregnancies borne within growing stages of impoverishment. Her bitterness with her environment is the product of this victimisation. She is trapped by a husband who hardly earns enough to feed, clothe, shelter and educate four children. She shamelessly asks Nita

Supriya Choudhury and Anil Chatterjee in a scene from the film.

to give over her jewellery for Gita's marriage, fully aware that Gita is marrying the man Nita was in love with. She makes Nita, Shankar and her husband the target of her frustrations and bitterness while she actually participates in the 'escape' of her other two children in their search for a 'better' life.

Nita's pretty sister Gita is victim of a cloistered life. Unlike Nita, she is not educated. The only males she gets to see are her brothers and her father. She has no future. So, when Sanat comes back to meet Nita after a long interval, she snatches the only chance she has to seek some kind of happiness in marriage with him. Aided and abetted by her mother, Gita blatantly betrays the love and the implicit trust Nita places on her by marrying Sanat. Had she not acted the way she did, she would have been condemned to a single state lived out in extreme poverty.

Montu and Shankar are victims too. Life offers them no choice. Their only point of escape is by absolving themselves of family responsibilities and turn to rescue their own lives. But in so doing, they make Nita their target, stripping her of dignity in life and death. When Montu fails in exams, he quickly takes up a job in a factory. He moves out after the accident on grounds that he will be able to get a nutritious diet there a football player like him needs. Shankar's dream of making it big as a singer is constantly fed with the confidence Nita places in him. His ambition takes priority over his sister's well-being and that is his failing as a human being, and as an older brother. Nita's father is victim of the uprooting due to the Partition. He is a schoolteacher who placed honesty, integrity and commitment above everything else. He feels betrayed by Partition. Though he is conscious of the family's victimisation of the elder daughter, he too participates in the violence by failing to raise his voice. Once, he sarcastically says that young girls are no longer married to old men because, "we are civilized, we educate them and exploit them to the full," accepting his participation in the family's pervasive and collective infliction of violence on Nita. As if in a strange irony reflective of the contradictions hidden within people, he retains his love for Wordsworth on the one hand and for folk music on the other.

The city of Calcutta, too, is both victimiser and victim. It is the victim of the changed geography of the state borders, truncated by Partition. It inflicts violence on girls like Nita, forced into a life created by Partition and forced migration. Ghatak's love for Calcutta, if ever he developed any, was concentric – confined to some marginal pockets. His attention repeatedly focusses on the marginal fringes of a Calcutta most of us have never known or cared to know. It is shorn of the glitzy chutzpah big metros are famous for.

In Meghe Dhaka Tara, the narrative unfolds against the backdrop of refugee colonies concentrated in Jadavpur, Netajinagar and Bijoygarh. The film opens with Nita halting to pull at a torn slipper on her way to work. She is the only earning member of a sprawling refugee family and cannot stop to have her slipper attended to by the wayside cobbler. The closing shot completes the circle. This time, it is not Nita, but an anonymous girl who takes Nita's place to feed her refugee family. She falters because her slipper is torn. Her gait and her body language is a duplication of Nita's. She quietly takes on from where Nita left off. The single leitmotif of a torn slipper, used as a framing device, is Ghatak's strong indictment on Calcutta. Calcutta, in Meghe Dhaka Tara, sustains the vicious circle of poverty and social injustice almost with a vengeance. Nita's death, in this sense, is not a moral lesson from Calcutta to its massive refugee population. Rather, it is a sustained threat, a warning that wears a pervasive, real and violent face.

In the end, her family 'consumes' her as fatally as her tuberculosis does. One is not sure about whether it is TB that takes her life or whether her family has virtually 'killed' her. The line between the family's brutal cruelty towards her and the spread of tuberculosis within her body gets blurred as the narrative moves towards its dramatic climax. Her desperate cry "Dada, I want to live," underscores the family's casual indifference to Nita as a human being and as the sole earning member of the family. The family as 'consumer' of the very member who holds it together marks the uniqueness of Ghatak's presentation of decaying values in the impoverished scenario of the refugee family.

Ritwik Ghatak had a unique and perceptive vision. It was a vision that assimilated the searing spectacle of Partition, the black memory of refugee camps, the degradation of rootlessness, the dehumanisation of the alienated and the emerging definitions of a new class struggle. With an iron discipline in his head and a majestic compassion in his heart, Ghatak externalised his private anguish into a global perspective. This heightening sensibility turned his art into a language that could be understood in distant Punjab and the rest of India, in Poland, Germany, Korea, Vietnam, Palestine and any country that had been sundered by the trauma of separation and the bleeding scar of an overnight border. ■

REMEMBERING GIRIJA DEVI (1929-2017)

A humble, classical singer who dedicated her life to art

The queen of *thumri* is no more. Girija Devi, one of India's most unassuming, grounded vocalists passed away recently. She will live through her music, her disciples and the particular style of *thumri* she evolved over the years. **Shoma A. Chatterji** pays a tribute

When I was barely 13, I had the golden opportunity of participating in the Annual Music and Dance Conference of the Prayag Sangeet Samiti in Allahabad in January 1957. My performance comprised a half-hour recital of Kathak of the Jaipur Gharana (*gharana* is place where the musical ideology originated) and despite my nervousness, it went without a hitch. After the performance, I saw a dignified woman dressed in a gold-bordered white sari, diamond nose-stud glittering in the spotlights, looking at me from the front row of the auditorium. I was told that she would give a recital the same night. My mother whispered to me that the woman was Girija Devi, the renowned vocalist who excelled in the *Thumri* School but reached out to many other schools. That was my first encounter with one of the greatest living legends of Indian classical music.

Not yet initiated into the rudiments of *thumri* (Hindustani classical music), I listened, mesmerised, to the great artiste sing to an audience that maintained pin-drop silence till the wee hours of the morning. Gone are those days of all-night programmes in classical music and dance. Yet, Girija Devi lived on, for many more years, performing, singing, giving recitals till a ripe age and teaching her disciples without charging a paisa. She even founded and ran a trust for poor students who were deeply interested and involved in music.

Many years later, when I had the opportunity of interviewing her during her brief visit to Kolkata, she said, "I still follow the *gurukul* system whenever I can, by keeping students in my home where they live and practice the whole day. I love to teach students who are truly dedicated to learning music." When the father of one of her disciples insisted on paying tuition fees for his daughter's training, she put the money in a bank account in the child's name and refused to accept the fee. When asked why, she said, "You cannot put a value on what we are doing because we have dedicated our entire lives to art."

Her father, Ramdeo Rai, a *zamindar* (land owner) was not only a lover of the arts but had also mastered the harmonium. He was proud to discover that his daughter, born in Varanasi in 1929, was endowed with the gift of music and rhythm and voice, and he took the gift seriously, a progressive attitude in those days. He placed her under training from the age of five with the Senia Gharana veteran Pandit Sarjuprasad Misra and, later, for more rigorous training in *khyal* under Pandit Shrichand Mishra. This was before she was launched into the world of the *puran ang thumri* of the Benares Gharana, which became her forte.

"For light songs, Bade Ramdasji and Chhote Ramdasji of Varanasi trained me for some time. I took lessons in *dhrupad* (a genre in Hindustani classical music) as well because it gives classical singers a solid base. But the many changing pitches in the *dhrupad* tend to affect the voice of female singers, investing it with a masculine tenor. So I did not sing *dhrupad* very much. Light classical numbers have been my forte and my major strength – *thumri, dadra, kajri, hori, chaiti* and *lavni*, these have been my constant companions in music," Girija Devi said.

Photo: Internet

The Purab Ang style of music become synonymous with Girija Devi.

"My mother and my grandmother were severely opposed to my musical training because in those days, girls from respectable families did not learn music or any other art and were expected to get married. I agreed to get married with one stipulation – that I was not stopped from pursuing music. I got married at 16 to a businessman who encouraged me right through my career with one condition – that I should only perform at public recitals and conferences and programmes and never take part in private functions as was the wont in those days. We both kept our promises till the end," said Girija Devi, with a charming smile.

Devi's first public concert was in Bihar in 1951. She was not only one of the leading vocalists in the dominant classical genre of the *khyal* but also in lighter forms of North Indian classical music including *tappa* and *tap-khyal*. She specialised in the *Purbi ang*, also made famous by Siddheshwari Devi and Begum

Akhtar. She recalled that her guru would bring home *thumri* experts like Rasoolan Bai and Bade Moti Bai who appreciated the young girl's talent but she did not learn from them.

"I concede that times have changed and to a certain extent, we must adjust to these changes, like it or not. I have discovered that it is possible to compromise without diluting my music for my audience. Audiences these days want a little bit of this and a little bit of that, what you would call a 'package programme'. They want to hear a bit of Ali Akbar Khan, a bit of Girija Devi and watch a bit of a Birju Maharaj Kathak recital. So, I have adapted to suit these tastes. I have taught myself to condense my concerts to present shorter, digestible pieces. And there is a very positive side to this variety. This way, people can imbibe a sense of the immense variety of Hindustani music from the serious *khyal* to the light *dadra and* a lilting folk number. But I am always conscious of not ever compromising on the purity of the *raaga* or making a *khichdi* of the gharana" she said.

Devi was professor of Music at the Benares Hindu University for several years. Varanasi also has a Girija Devi Foundation where music is taught regularly; till recently, by Devi herself. Devi is to Hindustani music what D.K. Pattammal is to Carnatic music. One noted journalist recalls how her music and her singing carried a philosophical strain and also a stroke of soft romance. But perhaps the greatest learning she had to offer was her cheerful demeanour. She was incredibly unassuming. One continued to be amazed at her endless energy, vitality and good humour even after 60 years of travelling all over the globe, giving music recitals. How did she do it?

"I do not have a magic potion. I lead a simple life, filled with happiness, cheer and music. I do not involve myself in needless tension or conflict.. When I was very young, I heard musicians in their eighties belting out brilliant music in their liquid honey voices. It was an unforgettable experience to watch how they had conquered age with their talent and their dedication. Today, artistes seem to succumb to age more easily. I did not. I still feel young. I am a purist in personal life. I involve myself in the daily puja rituals, practise yoga and meditation. All this helps in increasing concentration and keeping me cheerful all the time," Devi confided.

Apart from two honorary doctoral degrees from two Indian universities, Girija Devi collected many awards for her rich contribution to music. She was the recipient of the Padma Shri (1972), followed by Padma Bhushan (1989) and the Padma Vibhushan (2016). She won the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1977), Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship (2010), Maha Sangeet Samman Award (2012) Sangeet Samman Award (Dover Lane Music Conference) and the GIMA Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012.

While performing at a music conference in Patiala, Girija Devi lamented that traditional styles of music were in danger of fading away. "The future of classical music is safe but that of folk forms is not so safe. There are hardly any gurus left. Also, these styles are more challenging than classical forms that need improvisations within the *raga*. They tempt you to walk out of the *raga* and find your way back into it. It is like being led away from home and being asked to trace the road back. And homecomings are always tough." she said. ■

REMEMBERING SHASHI KAPOOR (1938-2017)

An actor everybody loved, whose dignity marked him out

Shashi Kapoor, one of the handsomest actors of his time, is no more. We will never see that dimpled, naughty smile on screen or off it. A young friend, who is a great fan of the actor, sadly said that she would see him quietly seated on his wheelchair in his last days at Prithvi Theatre. "No one would even say 'hello' to him because they were not sure whether he would respond or not," she said. But actress Simi's moving tribute to her co-actor in Siddhartha mentioned how the actor still recognised her when she approached him to say "hello.' **Shoma A. Chatterji** provides a snapshot of the actor's career

This reminds me of my very first glimpse of the star who was still groping to find his feet in Hindi cinema. It was a time when the term Bollywood had not entered the lexicon of Indian films. We were at the All-India Bengali Conference being held at the Brabourne Stadium in Mumbai, if I

Photo: SC

A young, dashing Shashi Kapoor.

remember right. I was listening to a recital by the late Suchitra Mitra one morning. Then, I suddenly saw a young man with a little blond boy with curly hair perched on his shoulders standing on the sidelines of the row I was seated in. Standing beside him was a young foreign lady with a little boy holding her hand. The man's face immediately echoed familiarity with and knowledge about Hindi cinema. This was Shashi Kapoor himself and the little boy was Kunal and the boy holding his mother Jennifer's hand was Karan Kapoor.

Shashi Kapoor was hardly star material at the time and his visit almost went unnoticed. At 16, I was too shy to approach him and introduce myself. He was dressed completely in white, down to his shoes with that mesmerising smile on his face, oblivious of those who recognised him. As people began to recognise him, he beat a hasty retreat with family, stepped into his car and sped away.

I met Kapoor many years later at the Calcutta Club in 1993. He had gained a lot of weight by then. Ismail Merchant had thrown a party following an invited screening of Muhafiz (In Custody) in which Kapoor played the great Urdu poet, Nur, who acted as a bridge between the modernisation and tradition conflict that had evolved within the purity of Urdu. He was surrounded by television crews and print media journalists and though he responded to their questions with the quiet, gentlemanly grace he was famous for, he withdrew soon after. Purist scholars of Urdu slammed the film for its wrong use of Urdu specially in the poetry but the film unto itself was a downslide for the Merchant-Ivory-Shashi Kapoor trio that had set new standards of cinema on Indian stories where English was mostly the lingua franca.

I also had the good fortune to see and talk to Violet Smith, the then 90-year-old Anglo-Indian lady who ran the Fairlawn Hotel on 13, Sudder Street, Kolkata where Kapoor spent his days with his bride Jennifer Kendall, after they eloped and married unknown to Jennifer's very angry father Geoffrey Kendall whose theatre group Shakespeareana Kapoor had joined as a young teenager of 18. Smith regaled me with her memories of the very young Kapoor and his older wife Jennifer who stayed in Room Number 17 that has now been turned into a sort of museum of memories surrounding the Kapoors.

Smith took me around and showed me the walls along the winding, wooden, antique staircase of the hotel plush with photographs of the very young Kapoor and his bride alongside newspaper articles on the pair in the hotel. It is such a beautiful piece of architecture filled with antiques, paintings, photographs, an old piano and other knick knacks that it should be declared heritage property in the city. Shashi Kapoor continued to stay in this hotel in Room 17 every time he visited Kolkata till 2005 which marked his last visit.

Kapoor was the slender, handsome youth in the early Merchant-Ivory film Shakespeare Wallah, and as an outraged father in Stephen Frears's Sammy and Rosie Get Laid. He portrayed the lead in seven English films and worked as a supporting actor/ narrator in five English films. His roster includes around 148 Hindi films filled with some of the best song tracks in Indian cinema at the time. He gravitated smoothly and effectively as supporting actor in 21 films, worked in four films as a child artist and made seven guest appearances. He portrayed the famous detective character Feluda created by Satyajit Ray for the television series Kissa Kathmandu Ka in 1986.

Kapoor did not run after roles and films. Producers and directors, too, did not chase him the way they would chase an Amitabh Bachchan or a Dharmendra at their peak. Yet, he did not budge from living life on his own terms that extended to defining his career as an actor and producer. It was his dignity that marked him out among both the Kapoors and the film industry he belonged to. He began his career as a child actor in Raj Kapoor's Aag (1948) and then in Awara as the younger Raj. He did his stint as child actor in several other films till he veered to theatre as he grew up. He did a child role in Sangram (1950) too.

Kapoor seemingly had no qualms playing characters secondary to Bachchan in many films that turned out to be box office hits, with Deewar turning out a classic. Kapoor's sober performance in the film fetched him *Filmfare*'s Best

Supporting Actor award. One of the most memorable scenes in the film is the exchange between the two estranged brothers who live separately. Bachchan tells Kapoor what has Kapoor got in life being an honest cop – a job, a uniform, a government quarter! Look at me, Bachchan says, I have wealth, property, everything. And then comes that line from Kapoor that stole many heats – *Mere paas ma hai* (I have mother with me).

The Bachchan-Kapoor pairing began with Manoj Kumar's multi-starrer melodrama Roti Kapda aur Makaan and went on through Deewar to end after twelve films together. Kapoor also cast Bachchan in the lead in his home production Ajooba in 1991 which turned out to be a flop. He produced Aparna Sen's directorial debut film 36, Chowringhee Lane, which Sen never forgets to mention, is her most memorable film ever as director. His choice to produce films was never based on market possibilities and he did not turn a hair when they flopped.

Kapoor's smashing looks somehow suppressed his talents as an actor par excellence. Even so, glimpses of his histrionics came across in several films. Some memorable performances that will remain etched in memory are in Shyam Benegal's Kalyug, in Gulzar's *Ijaazat* (a guest appearance), a supporting role in Trishul as the brother of Vijay played by Bachchan and as the naïve teacher going through his newly married teething troubles in his first appearance in the English language film The Householder based on a novel by Ruth Prawer Jgabvala and Romesh Sharma's *New Delhi Times* that finally fetched him a very belated National Award as Best Actor.

REMEMBERING RITA HENLEY JENSEN (1947-2017)

A fearless and compassionate journalist, one of a kind

Her last email to **Sakuntala Narasimhan** said, "I hope we get a chance to meet. It'd be wonderful." That meeting never took place. Rita Henley Jensen passed away recently in New York. Born on New Year's Day, 1947, she was 70 when she succumbed to breast cancer in October last year. Narasimhan sent us this piece, full of reminisces

Rita was founder and editor-in-chief emeritus of Womens eNews, a pioneering online daily news service devoted to gender equity on a global canvas. The website, which has followers and supporters around the world (from New York to New Delhi) received a whopping 2.4 million visits during 2017 (at last count, well before the close of the year) and also has contributors who write and report from different continents, spotlighting gender dimensions of region-specific issues encompassing politics, religion, workplace discrimination (and victories), education, health, sports, legislation, women with disabilities, gender linked cultural practices.

The coverage is comprehensive, each story carefully vetted by the editorial staff for veracity and objectivity to uphold journalistic standards, giving readers around the world insights into feminist issues specific to regions different from one's own. In the sixteen years since it was started, the website and its founder received over 46 prestigious awards, including an award for Best of the Net's Stories" (2015), the Forbes 100 Best Websites Award, and the Best Internet Site Award of the National Federation of Press Women (USA).

Founder Rita was named Media Person of the Year by the New York State Women's Press Club (2006) and chosen for the Woman of Excellence award of the National Association of Female Executives, and the Alumni award of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. She was also named 'One of the 100 most influential women in New York' (to name just a few of the honours that came her way for her work promoting gender equity through the media).

In May 2016, Rita was in Delhi to receive the Thought Leader of the Decade Award at the Women's Economic Forum. According to one obituary, when she visited the Taj Mahal at Agra and asked how Shah Jahan's wife had died, and was told that she had died in childbirth, her thoughts went to her investigations into the reasons for so many women (especially African-American) dying of childbirth-related fatalities.

The news stories commissioned by Womens eNews became resources for commercial mainstream media including the *New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times,* plus publications in the Philippines and Kaula Lampur which used the reports generated by the website .

Photo: SN

Rita Henley Jensen who inspired everybody with her indefatigable enthusiasm.

In 2013, Womens eNews also introduced a Teen Voices series, with contributions from teenage girls from around the world (including Veda, a schoolgirl from Bengaluru who had three articles published recently, about training in self defence for schoolgirls in India – in the wake of the Nirbhaya rape case in Delhi – the obsession with skin 'fairness" as an ingredient of the Indian concept of 'beauty', and inter-generational cultural conflicts in a changing society like India). "By reading Teen Voices, I got to know about the issues that girls of my age in America and Africa are concerned with – which are so different from what I and my friends see as 'teenagers' issues' in India," says Veda. In that sense, the website opened women's eyes to a broader canvas of gender issues in different parts of the world.

Even after radiation treatment and days before she passed away, Rita was reportedly working in bed, with a laptop; praise for her indefatigable enthusiasm for work poured in, from all quarters when she passed away. "Feminist media lost a Titan," said one comment. "She was a valiant woman... a warrior for women's rights... a trail blazer (who) made life better for so many," said another obituary. "Fearless journalist and a compassionate soul," said yet another.

Taking off from Jim Crow (discrimination against blacks in the US), she was working on a Jane Crow project, to focus on discrimination based on gender as well as race. By all accounts, it was a life dedicated to a passionate involvement with justice and fairness, through journalism, a life that lent inspiration to younger aspirants ranging from schoolgirls to housebound women and professional achievers. All this, after coming out of an abusive marriage, surviving on welfare with two small children to care for, and still doggedly enrolling for journalism courses, and graduating with honours. In her 16 years as editor-in-chief, she also mentored many young girls, took them on as interns and saw them develop into trained journalists. A scholarship is now being set up in her memory, at Columbia's School of journalism.

In 2006, when Maneka Gandhi, minister for Women and Child Welfare suggested that sex determination tests should be made compulsory in India to monitor and fight the destruction of female foetuses, Womens eNews ran a story detailing the ramifications of such a move (with doctors pointing out that making fetal sex determination compulsory is not the right way to tackle the pervasive cultural preference for sons, and that this could in fact promote illegal abortions and maternal distress).

An American follower of Womens eNews reacted to the report, by pointing out that it had opened her eyes to social issues that were so different from the controversy about abortion and right to life, in her country.

An adolescent schoolgirl from a small town in South India following the Teen Voices series, likewise, was intrigued by teenagers' obsession with dating and boyfriends, in the West. The website opened "windows that helped us peep into women's lifestyles in other regions and continents," as one Nepali housewife (who hails from a conservative family and sees no chance of her ever travelling abroad) put it.

The website will go on, carrying Rita's ideas and work forward. That would be the best tribute that the staff can pay, to a woman whose mantra was Onward! – undeterred by obstacles or setbacks, including the illness that claimed her on October 18 last year. ■

Journalists from *Malayala Manorama, Hindustan Times* bag PII-ICRC Awards

Mahesh Gupthan, chief reporter, Malayala Manorama, Thiruvananthapuram, bagg-ed the first prize for his article, They Are Also Our Pet Children, at the 11th edition of the PII-ICRC Annual Awards. In the Photography Section, the first prize went to Himanshu Vyas, chief photographer, Hindustan Times, Jaipur, for his photo-essay on the National Triangular Wheelchair T-20 Cricket Series.

This year, the theme was Living with Disability – Triumphs and Challenges.

In the Best Article category, T. Ajeesh, chief sub-editor, Malayala Manorama, Malappuram, Kerala, won the second prize for his article, Life on Wheels. Mini Thomas, special correspondent, The Week, Bengaluru, received the third prize for her article, Able to Inspire.

Raj K. Raj, special photojournalist, Hindustan Times, won the second prize in the Photography Section for his photo-essay titled, Meet India Gate's Charlie Mama. The third prize went to Kunal P. Patil, special photojournalist, Hindustan Times, for his photo-essay, Lost Hands, Not Dreams: India's Para-swimmer Heading to Rio Olympics.

A special award was announced for Swagata Yadavar and Prachi Salve for their three-part series, Why 12.1 Million Indians with Special Needs Are Illiterate, which appeared on the IndiaSpend website.

The jury members this year included Kamlendra Kanwar, senior journalist/ columnist and former editor of The Tribune, The Indian Express, and the Ahmedabad edition of The Times of India; S.R. Madhu, former journalist and now writer-editor; and Dr Jaya Shreedhar, adjunct faculty member, Asian College of Journalism, and former special correspondent, Frontline."

It was a packed hall at the Residency Towers.

Photos: PII-RIND

The award-winners pictured with the chief guest, members of the jury, Surinder Oberoi and Jeremy England, ICRC, and Sashi Nair, director, PII.

The awards were presented by Dr Santosh Babu, chairman and managing director, Tamil Nadu Handicrafts Corporation Ltd, and officer on special duty, Chief Minister's Special Cell, at a well-attended programme held at Hotel Residency Towers in Chennai on November 17.

Also present were the jury members, Surinder Singh Oberoi, political advisor, ICRC, and Ashish Bhatia, head of Production and Online Interaction, Communication, Research & Public Affairs Department, ICRC. Sashi Nair, director, Press Institute of India.

The awards, instituted by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Press Institute of India (PII), are presented every year. They are designed to promote and recognise the outstanding work of Indian journalists in the field of humanitarian reporting. Entries are required to depict the human suffering caused by disasters and situations of violence, and highlight the extraordinary resilience shown by people. ■

To breathe, or not to breathe?

Air pollution is a major concern for environment, health and human development world-wide. Despite well-documented consequences, 92 per cent of the world's population lives in places where the standard of air is below WHO norms. Meanwhile, air quality monitoring is inadequate by and large, and reporting on it is not efficient. As a result, air pollution is neither recognised nor addressed as the public health crisis it is. **Susan Philip** reports on a seminar conducted recently by the Press Institute of India

The Press Institute of India (PII) collaborated with Health Energy Initiative and Huma Lung Foundation to conduct a seminar for journalists on January 29, titled, Understanding & Reporting Climate, Air Pollution & Health. The aim was to help environmental and health journalists understand the scientific data around air monitoring, its health implications and the need for immediate action, with particular reference to Chennai.

Setting the context, Sashi Nair, Director, PII, said it was vital that journalists got information from credible sources, and also know how to interpret the huge scientific data that was available on air pollution, and present accurate information in a way that was easily understandable.

Addressing the seminar, Dr Arvind Kumar, chairman, Centre for Chest Surgery, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi, made it clear that the effects of pollution on the human lung were non-reversible. Yoga, exercise and other such methods could at best increase the lung capacity, they could not remove the deposits from polluted air that clogged th vital organ, he said. "And the bad news is, no one is a non-smoker in India, not even a new-born child, because the air quality is so bad that the mere act of breathing for a day equals smoking several cigarettes."

Nandini Kumar, TERI University, put the harm that pollution did in perspective by showing how every place was a part of the large whole – the Planet Earth, "which is all we have". Effects of pollutants were all-pervasive, she said, and explained that some pollutants had short life-spans, others longer ones, and the movement of air and water spread the pollutants to all corners of the earth. In effect, there was no longer any place on earth that was absolutely clean, she stressed.

S. Shankar, head, Environmental Health Engineering, Sri Ramachandra University, focused on the finding of studies conducted by the department, that residential biomass contributed to around 30 per cent of ambient pollution in India.

Ronak Sutaria, scientist, Urban Science, Mumbai, talked of the science and data behind pollution. He explained technical terms used in connection with air pollution, such as PM10, PM 2.5 (particulate matter that is 30 times smaller than human hair), TSPM and RSPM. Stressing the importance of continuous air quality monitoring throughout India, not just in Delhi and a few big cities, he walked the audience through the features of Atmos, an affordable PM2.5 monitor indigenously developed by his team.

Coordinator of the Community Environmental Monitoring Programme in India, Shweta Narayan, and her team demonstrated low-cost devices to monitor and collect air samples. "The catch is that these samples need to be sent abroad for analysis, as at present, the prohibitive cost of the necessary equipment keeps Indian labs from offering the facility," she said.

Writer-activist Nityanand Jayaraman translated the proceedings at intervals in Tamil for the benefit of journalists from the Tamil media. A panel discussion where story ideas were thrown up and discussed by the audience made a fitting finale to the seminar. ■

Photo: PII-RIND

Journalists and others at the seminar.

Journalist Gnani Sankaran passes away

Gnani Sankaran.

Journalist, playwright and literary critic Gnani died in Chennai recently. He was 64. He is survived by his wife Padmavathi, who is also a writer, and son, Manush Nandan, cinematographer. Gnani had been undergoing dialysis the past five years. His illness could not prevent the firebrand journalist of the 80s from indulging in what he thought was right and the principles he stood for. He was vocal in expressing his opinion always.

Gnani, whose original name was V. Sankaran, began his career at the *Indian Express*. He set up a Tamil periodical, *Dheem Tharikada.* He was also in charge of editorial production of the Sunday magazine section of *Murasoli* in late 1980s and *Junior Post* in the early 1990s. His columns, *O Pakkangal* in popular Tamil journals became a big hit and sometimes, his views triggered controversies.

Gnani ran a theatre group, Pareeksha. In his 40-year-long career, he had directed plays based on the works of several prominent writers, including Harold Pinter, Bertolt Brecht, J.B. Priestley, Vijay Tendulkar, Ashokamitran, Sundara Ramaswami and Jeyanthan. He had produced around 40 documentary films and half-a-dozen tele films. Among them was Ayya, which was based on Dravidian movement's prominent figure, E.V. Ramasamy. Born in Chengalpattu, Gnani passed out of Madras Christian College and was later, trained in theatre by Badal Sircar. He went on to produce in Tamil over 50 plays in various languages like Bengali, German and English.

In the early 1990s, a video he inadvertently shot of a V.P. Singh public meeting helped the special investigating team strengthen its case and investigation into the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. In the video shot by Gnani, Sivarasan was seen conducting a recce of what led to LTTE's eventual successful mission in eliminating Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991.

Over the past decade, he found a novel way of bringing together Tamil writers and enthusiasts to discuss Tamil literature and way forward. After finding a well in the backyard of the residence he rented in K K Nagar, he devised the idea of 'Keni', an informal meeting of enthusiasts of Tamil literature on the second Sunday evening every month. Considered to be the left-of-centre, he never hesitated in expressing his views. He contested the Alandur by-poll unsuccessfully in April 2014 on the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) ticket.

(*From reports in* The Hindu/ The Times of India/ The New Indian Express)

TOI's Gautam Siddharth dies suddenly

Prominent journalist Gautam Siddharth passed away recently. Siddharth, a senior editor at *The Times of India,* was at work when he collapsed and died of a heart attack, sources said. According to a report in Exchange4Media,_Siddharth's colleagues heard a sound from the washroom where they found him unconscious. He was immediately rushed to the nearby GB Pant Hospital where he was declared brought dead. His body was sent for post-mortem, according to the report. Siddharth hailed from Jharkhand's Ranchi district but he later moved to Bilaspur, now in Chattisgarh. He did his graduation from Bilaspur's CM Dubey College, and he later obtained a degree in journalism, from the noted Benaras Hindu University (BHU). He later moved to Delhi in the early 1990s to pursue journalism.

Siddharth started his career at a small bilingual magazine, printed from East Delhi. He later joined *The Pioneer.* A long-time columnist and writer, Siddharth covered a variety of issues ranging from national politics to world affairs. In the years before his demise, he has been working at *The Times of India's* Delhi office, and he lived alone in the city.

(*From a report in* First Post)

Andolana editor Rajashekar Koti is no more

Rajashekar Koti.

Rajashekar Koti, senior journalist and editor of *Andolana,* a Kannada daily, passed away on November 23 after suffering a massive heart attack. He was 71. A native of Huilagol near Gadag, Koti hailed from a family of landlords who later settled down in Mysuru.

Popularly known as Koti in the media circles and by his readers, he was a staunch progressive espousing socialist as reflected in the news columns of *Andolana,* which gained popularity in the Mysuru and surrounding areas, and which he launched in Mysuru in 1972. He began his journalistic career with *Prapancha* and *Vishwavani* publications (now defunct) before launching *Andolana*

Koti drew inspiration from several socialists and litterateurs. His daily covered the events associated with JP Movement threadbare, when socialist leader Jai Prakash Narayan was at the helm but stopped operations during the Emergency after raising a voice against it. Koti inspired several youth and his daily has large following in Mysuru, Chamarajanagar, Kodagu, Hassan and Bengaluru rural districts. Koti associated himself with many social welfare organisations to help the disabled and all those in need.

A member of the Karnataka Media Academy and a recipient of many awards, Koti was a strong patron of sports. The last rites were performed without any religious rituals in deference to his sentiments and beliefs, but Koti was accorded a guard of honour after which the cremation took place

(*Courtesy*: The Hindu, NewsKarnataka.com)

Humourist Ja Ra Sundaresan is dead

Bhakkiyam Ramasami.

Senior Tamil journalist, writer and humourist Ja Ra Sundaresan died after a brief illness. He was 87, and is survived by his wife and three sons. Born in Jalakantapuram of Salem District in September 1930, Sundaresan, who assumed the pseudonym of Bhakkiyam Ramasami, joined *Kumudam*, the Tamil weekly, as a member of the editorial desk in 1953, and worked for the journal as assistant editor and deputy editor till 1990.

Charukesi, Tamil writer and journalist, says that Sundaresan had even worked for *Kalkandu,* another Tamil journal, for a few years before joining *Kumudam*. A prolific writer, Sundaresan authored over 1000 short stories and two dozen novels. His main fictional characters were Appusami and Seetha Patti, whose images were ably produced by cartoonist Jayaraj.

While Sundaresan's hilarious pieces were published under the name of Bhakkiyam Ramasami, his serious works were published under other pen names, such as Mrinalini, S. Vijayalakshmi and Vanamali. He was considered to be a part of the 'trio' who had written answers to readers' questions under the popular column Arasu Pathilgal of the Tamil weekly, the other two being S.A.P. Annamalai and Ra.Ki. Rangarajan.

Sundaresan's commentary on the Bhagavad Gita was written in such a way that enabled ordinary people to follow the scripture. Another novel of his, *Poongaatru*, dealt with a veena maestro, and he was helped by his relative, flautist N. Ramani Sundaresan, in writing the piece of work, which drew appreciation from violin maestro Lalgudi G. Jayaraman, Charukesi points out.

(*Courtesy:* The Hindu)

Kunwar Narain, Jnanpith recipient, passes away

Kunwar Narain.

Jnanpith award recipient Kunwar Narain, whose distinctive humanist voice made him one of the most distinguished poets in post-independent Hindi lit-erature, passed away at a city hospital on Wednesday. He was critically ill for the past four months, sources close to the litterateur said. He was 90.

Born in Faizabad, Narain was a post-graduate in English literature like several other Hindi poets of the time. His first book of poems, Chakravyuh, came out in 1956 during the early, heady years of the Nayi Kavita (New Poetry) movement. He earned further notice after being featured in Teesra Saptak (1959), a seminal anthology edited by the renowned Agyeya

Narain's mother and sister died of tuberculosis when he was 11. An article by Arundhati Subramaniam for poetryinternationalweb.net says that the event had "an enduring impact on his life" and "contributed to the recurrent theme of death in his writing." Among other things, "a close and sustained interaction with socialist politician Acharya Narendra Dev shaped his awareness of Indian politics and the philosophies of Marxism and Buddhism in particular."

Apart from writing verse, Narain penned short stories and literary criticism. He translated poetry, notably of Argentine litterateur Jorge Luis Borges. And he also wrote extensively on world cinema before writing on the subject became fashionable.

(*Courtesy*: The Times of India)

Journalist shot dead by unidentified assailants

Naveen Gupta, a Kanpur-based journalist, was shot dead in November by unidentified assailants on a bike in Bilhaur, Kanpur. Gupta succumbed to his injuries on the way to the hospital. Gupta was a contributor for *Hindustan*, a leading Hindi daily. The incident came days after a Tripura journalist, Sudip Datta Bhawmick, was allegedly shot dead by a Tripura State Rifles personnel at the headquarters of 2nd Battalion in RK Nagar, around 30 km from Agartala.

Similarly, another journalist from Tripura, Santanu Bhaumik, was allegedly beaten to death by tribal party cadres while he was covering a clash between the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) and the Tripura Rajaer Upajati Ganamukti Parishad (TRUGP) in Mandai, in September. Journalist and activist Gauri Lankesh was shot dead outside her Bengaluru residence by unidentified men on a bike on September 5.

In the latest World Press Freedom ranking released in April, India was ranked 136 among 180 countries, indicating the dismal conditions in which Indian journalists work.

Journalist shot dead in Tripura

Yet another journalist was killed in Tripura, the second in two months. Sudip Datta Bhaumik was

allegedly shot by a jawan of the 2nd Tripura State Rifles (TSR) at RK Nagar, about 20 km from Agartala. Nandagopal Reang, the TSR constable has been arrested by the police. The incident occurred two months after another journalist, Shantanu Bhowmik was killed by a mob allegedly in the presence of the police at Mandai, about 40 km from Agartala.

"Sudip Datta Bhaumik, who was a senior journalist with our newspaper, had gone to meet the Commandant of the 2nd TSR at RK Nagar after obtaining a due appointment from him. But when he reached there he apparently had an argument with a PSO of the Commandant outside the latter's office, during which the PSO shot at him. Sudip died on the spot," Subal Kumar Dey, editor of *Syandan Patrika*, a leading Bengali newspaper of Agartala, told The Indian Express over telephone.

(*Courtesy*: The Indian Express)

Delhi journalists condemn action against *The Tribune*

Journalists from various media houses condemned the UIDAI's decision to file an FIR against *The Tribune* for exposing the possible threat to the private data of people enrolled with Aadhaar. At a meeting organised by the Delhi Union of Journalists, the journalists said the Centre is misusing law to intimidate and harass the Fourth Estate. They further said it is their duty to oppose the manner in which the legal system is being misused. The meeting also expressed concern at the proliferation of false information and fake news and said the country is going to an era of darkness, where no discussion is allowed on matters of public importance.

Editor of *The Tribune* Harish Khare said in a message to the meeting that he is "thankful" to the Centre and the UIDAI and the police for slapping a criminal case against *The Tribune* and its reporter Rachna Khaira. "I wish to reiterate — with all the seriousness and as responsibly as possible — that what Khaira did was nothing more than perform her duty as a professional journalist. And, we at *The Tribune* did nothing more than what any other set of editors would have done," he said.

Khare added that journalists in *The Tribune* believe in the Constitution and its values and seek to provide space to the voices of dissent. "And, yet, we are sought to be hauled up for doing a spot of honest, legitimate investigative reporting; we are sought to be intimidated for practising a bit of old fashioned journalism," he said.

(Courtesy: The Hindu BusinessLine*)*

First Urban Journalism Academy in Delhi

United Nations commenced the first Urban Journalism Academy in New Delhi with broad participation from more than 40 media professionals from across India. The academy shone light on issues that are key to urban spaces today in light of rapid urbanisation and ever limited resources. The academy was a two-day precursor to the World Urban Forum 9 (WUF 9) to be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 7 to 13 February and focused on Cities 2030, Cities for All: Implementing the New Urban Agenda.

In the spotlight was the New Urban Agenda (NUA), adopted at the Habitat III in Ecuador in 2016. It provides the critical course to the holistic cities of the future that are inclusive and sustainable and assimilate the Sustainable Development Goals. The first day of the academy saw introductions to the WUF 9 and the New Urban Agenda. Keeping with the theme of the WUF 9, some of the issues deliberated on were housing as the most critical element in cities that can be the stimulus for economic development and poverty eradication.

The afternoon session focused on climate action, environmental sustainability and resilience. The concluding session on day one focused on urban development, management and policy and the key enablers of urban prosperity. The second day of the academy saw sessions on innovative governance, urban economy and municipal finance.

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